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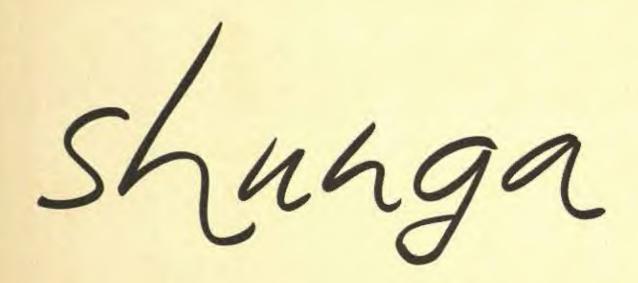
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IMAGES OF SPRING

ESSAY ON EROTIC ELEMENTS IN JAPANESE ART



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INTRODUCTION

This is a book of what the Japanese call SHUNGA, "Images of Spring": erotic, sensual pictures that form a part of the treasury of Japanese art. Our intention is not to provide an interpretation of the pictures that in any way casts a reflection on a country deserving of nothing but respect; the pleasures of the flesh belong to the entire world and all forms of art have exalted them everywhere, sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes openly and frankly.

The subject of the exhibition "Painters of our Time", held at the Musée Galliéria in Paris in summer 1963 was "The Couple", and the exhibition was devoted to scenes of love painted with complete frankness. A curious feature of the exhibition was the Japanese influence discernible in two drawings; one by Pierre Ambrogiani showing a woman struggling with round-headed, beaked monsters with frog feet; the other by Yves Brayer, showing union on a galloping horse, a representation also to be found in Japan and in the China of the Mongols.

As with KAMA KALA, ROMA AMOR, and EROS KALOS, we have sought to present everyday reality, without falsifying or mutilating it. We have placed the subject in the context of the fundamental beliefs of the Japanese and the social development that took place in 17th century Japan.

Grateful acknowledgements are made to the following scholars who have most generously helped us and given advice: Perry T. Rathbone, Director, Boston Museum; Robert T. Paine, Hsien-Chi Tseng and Alan Priest, curators at the same museum; John A. Pope, of the Washington Museum, Serge Elisseeff and Vadim Elisseeff, professors at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Paris; Pierre Landy, François Toussaint and André Brunet.

ESSAY ON EROTIC ELEMENTS IN JAPANESE ART

That erotic elements exist in Japanese art, in painting and especially in prints, will surprise only those who still believe in the myth of the impassive East. When we speak of painting we do not refer to the crude and vulgar pictures sold secretly in Europe as in the Far East, aimed at the repressed and devitalized. The greatest Japanese painters have produced erotic albums in abundance. These are works of art placed on the same level as others, without the slightest censure from even such an authoritarian and fastidious government as the Bakufu (except during its rare fits of prudery, as short-lived as they were ineffective).

The existence of this state of affairs arouses speculation. To some people it will seem that since eroticism is human it must be characteristic of all civilizations. They can adduce such examples as Greek eroticism, in which the pleasures of the flesh and of the mind are combined in the cult of beauty, and the gods set every kind of example, disposing men and women towards a sexuality without complexes; or eroticism in Roman times, more imbued with the influences of the east and the mystery religions but perfectly normal, even in its wildest excesses; or the sacramentalized eroticism of the Hindu temples, which is sometimes thought to be the origin of the cults of Dionysus and Osiris. They can cite the sexual repressions of Christianity—a commonplace of history that still needs its interpreter and a comparison of the precept with the reality. They can point to the sudden growth of eroticism in the Renaissance: the nude figures of the school of Fontainebleau; the dalliances of the gods of the Palazzo Farnese castigated by La Bruyère; the very odd works produced by Titian for the private pleasure of Charles V; the Cabinets secrets du Parnasse, where Ronsard, Baïf, du Bellay, Jodelle, Malherbe and his pupils, and Mathurin



Régnier were in the habit of meeting; then La Fontaine himself and the libertines of the 17th century. Representations of love in 18th-century France, for instance, with their more or less obvious allusions and crudenesses, and the *Memoirs* of the time, among which those by Gourdan occupy an important place, would all help elucidate the many and varied meanings of eroticism. The examples in France would end up with some of the ribaldries of Victor Hugo or Alfred de Musset, Baudelaire's banned pieces, and Verlaine's brochure *Women (Printed secretly and not on sale anywhere*, it says on the frontispiece). This series of instances is more or less confined to France, but could be paralleled in whatever country one happens to be. But if the analysis is extended beyond representations or descriptions of activities, it will soon be seen that all this human sexuality is not simply the satisfying of an animal instinct but contains feelings, ideas, religions, and beliefs as well as a shifting social evaluation of amorous relationships. The words used, in the approximation that is all translation can give them, do not have the same psychological resonance in different languages and fundamental differences will be found to underlie superficial similarities. Generalizations and, even more, easy comparisons must therefore be avoided.

This is the frame of mind in which Japanese erotic pictures must be approached.

This book is called SHUNGA, which means Images of Spring. The ambiguity is at once obvious. This is not Botticelli's Primavera, with the Graces executing a delicate dance under Cupid's arrows. Nor is it the pretty flowery sketch of Théophile Gautier: Printemps, peux tu venir?, nor the spring of the ribald songs. It is none of these. Nothing in the expression Images of Spring conjures up charming frivolity or contains any suspicion of innuendo. Rather does it imply beauty and vital energy. In Japan the word "season" has an infinitely more exact connotation, a meaning more charged with emotion, than in Europe, probably because of the astonishing regularity with which the seasons come and go. To the Japanese the season is a living reality. A hermit mentioned by Kenko, who gave up all earthly things and all worldly pleasures, was nevertheless not regarded as blameworthy for saying "The only thing that still affects me is the fugitive beauty of the seasons in the sky." Until the 19th-century reforms,





spring was the beginning of the lunar year, starting in the first days of February. "You experience," again says Kenko, "a strange feeling of newness. It is most moving to see the dazzling gaiety of the main streets, with the red pines in front of each door."

Already the pink and white blossoms are opening on the leafless branches of the plum trees. Soon the white cherries, lining the roads and canals or grouped around the country cottages, will burst into flower as though to light up the sombre landscape. A little later come the hollyhocks, which will decorate the temple chariots of Kama at Kyoto, and then the azaleas will turn the flower beds red in the gardens and shoot their pink branches amongst the trees in the mountain forests. And here is the wistaria, its tendrils lovingly embracing the giant Japanese cedars and its clusters of flowers blending with the dark pine needles. Everywhere the leaves are decking themselves out in an infinite variety of hues of green, and people go to gather the delicate croziers of the sprouting ferns, beneath the snow that is already swelling the babbling streams. It is not just a question of an enchantment for the eyes; the Japanese have an intimate feeling for the rising of the sap and the intensity of the life of nature, in which they share directly and with which they feel a tie that cannot be described in words. It is not only because of tradition that even today the people gather under the cherry trees in spring, as they do in autumn under the red maples; it is because the vitality of man is linked with the vitality of the earth, the flowers, and the trees. Singing, dancing, carousing, and embraces in the shrubberies are part and parcel of these gatherings; only a few squeamish people are shocked, and they are remote from their own people.

Legends reflect the soul of man. Developed and expanded by oral tradition, they continue to live on even when fixed in writing, notwithstanding the corrections and interpolations of the scribes. This is more or less what happened in Japan. A collection had already existed dating from A.D. 620. A little later, the emperor Temmu ordered that everything known about earliest antiquity should, with the aid of the guild of "reciters", be written down. This was the *Kojiki*, and it was completed in 712. Another collection was compiled in 720: the *Nihonji*. It embroiders a little on the previous collection and does not escape the influence of Chinese ideas, already noticeable in the *Kojiki*.



Here we shall deal only with the passages that describe the way in which the primitive gods, multiplying in the sky, succeeded in subduing Chaos, which was "like an ocean of oil or a fertilized egg". The eighth generation produced the pair Izanagi, the Inviting Male, and Izanami, the Inviting Female. They advanced on the floating bridge of heaven and plunged their divine jewel-encrusted lance into the magma. They stirred it and the viscous liquid thickened. When they pulled it out, the first island was born from the brine running off it. The pair descended on to it and there erected the August Celestial Pillar.

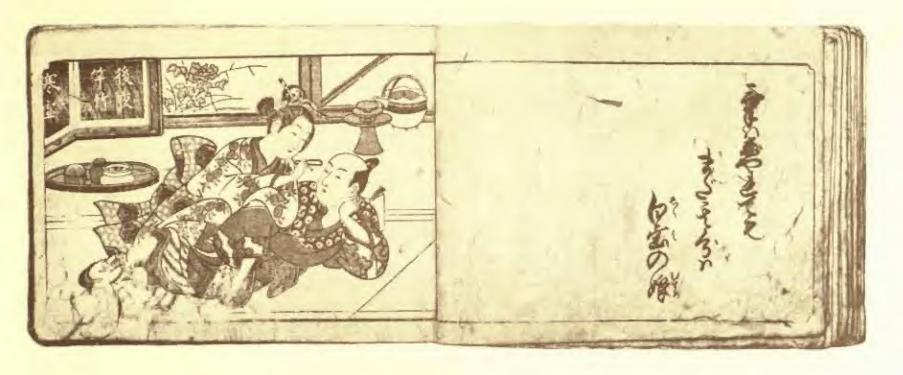
The Male asked: "Thy body, how was it made?" and the Female replied: "It grew everywhere, except at one spot. And thine?" The Male replied: "Mine, like thine, grew everywhere, but more especially at one spot. Were it not good to place that part of my body which is in excess into that part of thine which is in deficit? Thus we could make some new countries." The Female having agreed, the Male suggested that they go round the pillar, one to the right and the other to the left, and unite where they meet. Thus they came face to face. The Female was the first to speak: "What a handsome and lovable young man!" And the Male replied, "What a beautiful and lovable young girl!" Although the Female was the first to show her readiness, their union was inspired by the movements of a wagtail that happened to be there. Alas! the first child was a jelly-like mass that had to be put into a reed cradle, which the sea bore away. On consultation, the gods above—and here one feels that there was a Chinese interpolation—explained that this misfortune had befallen the Female for having been the first to speak. Back on their island, the couple went through the same ritual, but this time the Male took the initiative. The islands of Japan were born from this union, and with them other gods, mountains, rocks, the oceans and the waves, plants, animals, and subterranean grottoes. Mankind multiplied.

Izanagi, the Inviting Male, of exalted and fruitful love, lost his wife Izanami, the Inviting Female, when she gave birth to the God of Fire. Before dying, Izanami gave birth to more divine beings in her dejecta. Izanagi was stricken with grief and, prostrated at the foot of her bed, wept for his young and beautiful sister. Then he rebelled and killed the son who had been the cause of her death. But can one kill fire? From the Fire God's blood sprang a thousand other divinities. Izanagi desired to go down to the underworld to bring back his wife, and succeeded in doing so by a trick. But, like Orpheus, he wished to see his beloved and she, having eaten of the food of the dead, was a mere rotting corpse. This was the first separation. The Female, disgusted at being discovered in this condition, with all her beauty lost, drove away her husband, who was pursued by the female demons of the kingdom of darkness. He

escaped with great difficulty, partly by his skill and partly by his strength, and, sullied by these inhuman contacts, went to purify himself in a river in Kyushu. The slightest gesture he made created new dieties. From his left eye arose Amaterasu, the Goddess who makes the Sky Resplendent, that is, the Sun. From his right eye arose the moon, August Owner of the Night Sky. From his nose arose Susanowo, the Impetuous Male. The latter by his turbulence and brutality brought anarchy into the celestial world. He united with his sister, Amaterasu, but in spite of his sworn promises ravaged everything about him; broke the dykes on the rice fields; attacked the palace of the sun and threw on it the stinking carcase of a dead horse; wounded Amaterasu's spinning and weaving girls "in their intimate parts"; and spread terror abroad. The Sun Goddess retired into a cavern, night enveloped the world, and all was desolation. The other gods took council among themselves and hit upon a strategem. Since Amaterasu was a woman, she would not fail to be attracted by a mirror; it would be enough to arouse her curiosity. A feast was arranged and Amano-Usume performed a comic and lascivious dance. On hearing the great laughs by which the gods were shaken, Amaterasu, who thought she had left nothing but sadness behind her, could not in her surprise resist the temptation, opened her door a little, saw herself in the mirror, and went up to it. Immediately the cave was closed and daylight reappeared. Susanowo was banished and continued his adventures on Japanese soil, in that part which was to become the great religious centre of Izumo. He liberated the country from an eight-headed dragon which devoured virgins and concealed a magic sword in its tail-another symbol, with the mirror, of the reigning dynasty. Susanowo's son became the master of the Eight Islands and fought against the jealous gods; and among his descendants we find the hero Yamato Take, a doughty destroyer of brigands and a great lover of undaunted passion.

The community of gods in the sky did not entirely recover its calm with the departure of the *Impetuous Male*. The great god Sarata barricaded all the roads and no one could calm him or pacify his rages. So the goddes Usume was sent to him. She approached him "baring her breasts and lowering her garments below the navel." Thus Usume pacified the savage god, without anyone considering this a sacrifice.

This corpus of legends, which we have only just skimmed over, corresponds to what in the Shinto religion is called for convenience the "Way of the Gods", of the myriads of kami. The words "religion" and "god" are misleading, for in spite of the efforts of Motoori and the Hirata in the 18th century,































and the theorists of the Imperial regime of the 19th century, it is impossible to arrive at a coherent cosmogony or introduce into it any philosophical meaning. The word "animism" is no better, since there is neither opposition nor incongruity between man and everything that exists in nature; the same living spirit animates and fertilizes them both. Thus the hero Yamato Take, bent with age, speaks to a solitary old pine and calls it his elder brother. The *Little Flowers* of St. Francis employ the same language; they refer to brother rock and brother donkey.

Every man participates in creation and creation is fundamentally good. The concept of the soul, although in the course of centuries it became more precise, still remains rather vague. On the death of the body, the souls go to below the thirty-third heaven where all the gods live, and there they are happy, as Father Kaempfer noted in 1732 in his history of Japan, adding that there is no hell. There is, properly speaking, no sin either; only misdemeanours, which society curbs, or, from the point of view of the *kami*, impurities, which must be cleansed in the manner of Izanagi coming out of the underworld, by ablutions and exorcisms performed by the priest. The *kami* are never awesome divinities; they are honoured without being worshipped. They live with men, and their spirit, indwelling in everything, invokes this communion of all souls. Some characteristic lines from the *Noh* entitled *Oimatsu* read as follows: «Suddenly every dewy plant and tree seems to tremble at the bounty of the gods. O luxuriance, everywhere proclaiming the spring!... Are plants really bereft of a soul? For they are in thrall to life's duties in this world of illusions; indeed, they are well acquainted with them."

Nowhere else in the world it is possible to find such trust in life, such an intense appetite for it, such an exalted joy in it, such complete optimism. Neither love with its pleasures nor pure sexuality is condemned. Leaving aside the solar myths and contrasts of this mythology, let us look closer at the procreation legends and phallic stories in which are found the fertility symbols of man and of nature.

The Mother Goddess, full-breasted and with legs apart, is already to be found in the primitive terracotta statuettes of the Jomon period. The phallic cult was the most common. Although in 1872 the Tokyo

Government ordered the suppression of these cults, both to abolish primitivism and to avoid upsetting the prejudices of squeamish foreigners, the deep beliefs of the people have not changed. "The fearless innocence of the Japanese does not flinch before any form of realism," writes Revon in his work on the Shinto.

D.G. Ashton and B.H. Chamberlain, the translators of the Nihonji and the Kojiki, adopt and clarify the views held by Japanese specialists such as Motoori and Hirata. They recognize the phallus of heaven



in the celestial lance which first brought fertility to the earth. They find its emblem in the pillars at the end of the balustrades of numerous bridges, on the top of which there is a sort of bulbous object in wood or in bronze. The ritual fire-lighter is also a phallic symbol: cotton waste between two boards containing the source of the light; the rubbing together of these forest elements brings about the conception of fire, the mysterious fire that devoured the mother in the myth of Izanami. The penis (Ama) is found in the name of the blacksmith god Ama-Tsu-Maru, servant and master of iron and of the fire making the Sun's



lance. And the rai-tsui, the thunderbolt bludgeons of the excavations, are very much more phallic symbols than weapons of war.

The phallus itself is transformed into a definite god possessing his own temples: Konsei-Mijo-jin (Konsei means Extract, or Seed, of Gold, and Mijo-jin, the marvellous God). He had a shrine above Nikko, at the Konsei-toge, which contained a golden phallus that was stolen by brigands and replaced by one of stone. The same god can be found on some domestic altars and frequently in inns. In the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries in the pleasure districts, an evening prayer invoked Konsei-Mijo-jin. On the old road to Nikko there were rows of phallic emblems which disappeared with the coming of the railway. They recalled Mount Nantai (Male Form), whose sacred slopes could only be climbed by men. Even to-day other phallic emblems, fertility symbols, are to be found at the edges of fields; and if two pines or two Japanese cedars grow up together from the same root forming a pair, a phallic stone is placed between them.

In the shade of the most famous temples, along the pilgrim roads, and in front of the innumerable shops, there stand the *tanuki*, polecats, nearly six feet high, whose adventures, misdeeds, and pranks have frequently been described in popular tales. Their huge genitals hang down to the ground, testifying to their procreative powers. Small versions are on sale for the use of the faithful.

Processions in which phalluses were carried were very widespread, and gave rise to noisy and tumultous gatherings. D.H. Ashton has described one held near Tokyo at the end of the 19th century. A phallus several feet tall and painted a brilliant vermilion had been set up in a sort of portable shrine carried by a crowd of young men shouting and roaring with laughter. They zigzagged along, lurching suddenly from one side of the street to the other. It was an absolute orgy. The same author informs us that in 1868 a similar procession invaded the foreign districts at Kobe, obliging people modestly to cover their faces.

The Reverend Mr. Griffiths, in his work on the Religions of Japan, noted the existence of a phallic cult throughout the entire Japanese archipelago. It is, he observed, the backbone of Shintoism, and he acknowledged the innocent character of the cult. On all occasions when he had been present, he added, he had never had any reason to doubt the sincerity of the worshippers. Nor had he ever had any reason to see in the cult anything but an attempt on the part of man to solve the mystery of being and power. In 1907 Revon said of the phallic cult: "It is intermediate between the worship of the animal world and



that of the human world. From the beginning man has found it proper and noble to admire the phenomenon of generation, which is nature's greatest work. He deifies this mysterious life force, which satisfies powerful instincts, preserves the continuity of the race, and renews everything on the earth: its fruits, its herds, its harvests, and man himself."

The SHUNGA, the *Images of Spring*, will be better understood if, during a trip to Japan, the visitor goes to the festival of the Shinto temple at Tagata, in the prefecture of Aichi, near the little village of Ajioka. It takes place in March, on the 15th day of the first lunar month, that is, at the beginning of spring. In 1959, Professor Numazawa Kiichi, of Nanzan University, Nagoya, published a learned study



on this temple and its ceremonies in *Acta Tropica*. We shall consider only the beliefs that are still alive today, even though they are from the archaeological standpoint debatable.

The ceremonies in this temple are undoubtedly connected with the old myths of Izanaga, *The Inviting Male*, and Izanami, *The Inviting Female*. He is the father of Amaterasu and her Sky; she, the mother of the Earth. From their union was derived the fertility of the soil, and it is certainly the fertility of the soil that is the object of the rites. The goddess Tamahine to whom the temple is dedicated is the goddess of the rice fields. Legend makes of her a lonely widow, presumably also with all the weaknesses of a widow, and deserving of sympathy. The worthy peasants therefore console her by bringing her a huge phallus.

The ceremony takes the following form. In front of the procession walks a herald who ensures the ritual purity of the route. Then come in succession a brightly coloured banner, measuring three feet by six, with an effigy of a phallus; the headmen of the village, each holding a long bamboo rod; the musicians in ceremonial costume; five priests; then the bearers of offerings. Two villagers carry a coffer draped in white containing a stone naturally shaped like a phallus, whose magic powers are such that it cannot be looked at. An enormous phallus then follows in an open palanquin carried by twelve boys dressed in white. It is cut from a cypress and measures some six feet in length and twenty inches in diameter. Alongside the statue of the warrior is carried to whom it supposedly belongs.

The chief priest, the organizer of the ceremonies, brings up the rear of the procession, with young people carrying a dozen or so cleyerias, the sacred trees of the Shinto temples. These have been chosen and presented by neighbouring villages and their branches are hung with paper amulets, little bags containing five kinds of cereals—rice, wheat, barley, millet and wild grasses—and, finally, some phallic symbols. The boys have red painted phalluses attached to their belts. Men at the road-side hold other phalluses in their hands and show them to the women and girls with great bursts of laughter.

The procession reaches the temple. The two palanquins with the offerings are placed before the divinity and prayers are said for good harvests. Then the people literally go wild. They rush upon the cleyerias as soon as they pass the barrier, tear off the branches, and seize the amulets, struggling violently to get them. Getting hold of the phalluses is the occasion for much scuffling and fighting; everybody wants to get away with such a talisman, and fisticuffs and shouts of joy intermingle. From the

top of the temple little pink-coloured rice cakes are thrown to the crowd as bringers of good luck. Sake flows liberally, and the celebration goes on, wild and sensual.

The temple does not fail to sell to the faithful phallic figures of every kind, of wood, metal, stone, or porcelain; they are fetishes that bring good fortune. Some of these figures are even supposed to be able to cure disease or bring a wanted child. It is said that officialdom was afflicted on one occasion by an attack of prudery and orders were given that all the phalluses should be thrown into the temple pond. But the agents entrusted with this sacrificial task fell strangely ill and all the objects of the cult had to be duly reinstated to avoid the anger of the gods.

Such are the spring sights still to be seen at the temple at Tagata.

When Buddhism reached Japan at the end of the 6th century, and gained such a hold, first on the aristocracy and then on the entire people, that all their thoughts and feelings were deeply imbued with it, it might have been thought that the old Shinto beliefs would have been undermined and gradually disappear. This would be to fail to appreciate the Japanese sense of balance, if not compromise, and the very strong national tendency towards religious syncretism. Believers in Shinto undoubtedly resisted

the intrusion of a foreign doctrine, but the triumph of Buddhism in no way abolished the primitive deities protecting the country's soil. It is surely true to say that every Emperor is, so to speak, Shintoist by definition, since the dynasty goes back to Amaterasu, Goddess of the Sun, and an Imperial princess is traditionally sent to the temple of Ise. Nevertheless, the court and the Emperor himself can at the same time be fervent Buddhists. Towards 1100, coexistence of the two religions was actually even officially authorized by the doctrine called *Ryobu-Shinto*, which assimilated the Shinto gods to the avatars of the







Buddhist divinities. In the 19th century, the Government wished for political reasons to dissociate Shintoism from Buddhism, but this subterfuge met with resistance arising from deep beliefs. There is no Buddhist temple of any sect whatever without a Shinto shrine in its enclosure. Every spring Kyoto, though closely linked with Buddhism, continues to hold a solemn procession of carriages decorated with hollyhocks in honour of the Kamo river gods, protectors of the city. In the streets and at the cross-roads, anywhere in fact where a *kami* can be found, the niches in the walls are always decorated with flowers.

Nothing can quench the optimism of Japan, nor her eagerness to live life in all its forms, including the open, healthy, simple sexual form we have already met. Nor can anything diminish the intensity of her emotions when confronted with nature and humanity, her ever impressionable and vital feelings, her ardour for beauty.

It is probable that Buddhism exalted this emotional tendency. Revon remarks that Buddhism "has great difficulty in inculcating sad thoughts in this gay-hearted ancient people". This is not the place for a discussion on Buddhist philosophy, but it appears that the doctrine of Karma, which sees past lives and actions as conditioning life in the present, always leaves room for the hope that one day this fatal sequence of events will be broken. What is of interest to us here is to note that the Japanese interpretations of Buddhism are never depressing. This is particularly true for the Amitabha Sect. Doubtless its transience is a threat to existence, but existence remains a reality; doubtless it is desirable to resist temptation and the lusts of the flesh; doubtless too it is necessary to counsel retreat from the world in order to cleanse the soul of its impurities. Nevertheless, it is extremely rare to encounter narrow bigotry. People may pity someone who sips the cup of pleasure to the full without thought for his last hour, but they will continue to smile indulgently on him.

We have already mentioned the name of Kenko. Kenko was a former court official who towards the middle of the 14th century, when he was still under forty, became a monk and withdrew from the world. He has left us a book of reflections, the *Tsuretzuregusa*, which is still the bedside reading of many Japanese. It is indeed a good guide.

"Did he in every way excel", he writes, "the man who has never experienced love would remain a miserable man: a vessel precious but flawed. To have his garments bedraggled by the evening dew, not to know where to place his wandering footsteps... to lose his peace of mind, to have his spirit vexed by a

thousand troubles and still, only too often, to find no ease at night while lying solitary on his couch—is not this the salt of life?" "Love," he adds, "in truth thy roots are deep and thy sources remote... only the desires of the flesh are as difficult to extinguish in the old as in the young, in the wise as in the simple, whoever they be." It is a passion in the hearts of men, who "will not listen to reason and never cease to seek out a loved one, cherishing unforgettable memories of moments of emotion and tenderness." Here is a lover who keeps a secret assignation, probably with one of the ladies of the court, whose love affairs,



though known and tolerated, must be conducted discreetly. It is spring and Kenko feels sorry for those who have not known these emotions: "A night heavy with the scent of prunus; a veiled moon; a moment of hesitation, standing near the enclosure." Then, after a night of passion, "the moon in the dawn sky, on the way out of the Imperial palace scattering the dew on the grass." Here again is a lover leaving after a night of love. The cock crows. "Tenderly he continues his conversation. The cock crows again, louder this time, and he realises that dawn is breaking; but the time has not come to be off into the night.





He waits a little longer. Finally day dawns pallidly between the shutters. With a thousand ineffaceable promises, the visitor gets up and departs. The tops of the trees and the gardens all about him are so wonderfully green that, at the memory of all those many charms, even when the great camphor tree has vanished from his sight, he continues to see them in his mind's eye. From his dwelling, he will no fail before dropping off to sleep to write a poem to his beloved and send it to her."

This atmosphere of exalted love and emotional feeling, this abounding confidence in nature, could not be better described.

Kenko expects a great deal more of the *Inviting Male*: first a handsome face, for he is very susceptible to the beauty of youth, whatever its defects; also perfect taste, permitting itself every refinement of garb and the use of delicate perfumes. "Whose heart does not beat faster at a delicious perfume?" He calls

for delicacy and sensitiveness of feeling, also poetical and musical talent. If he condemns vulgarity, especially when it accompanies drunken orgies, as shameful for men as for women (not to mention the over-indulgence of priests), he loves gatherings where sake maintains genuine cordiality and he smilingly forgives those who sleep it off for the rest of the night.

Kenko, the 14th-century monk who observed the world with so much acuteness, such an awareness of humanity, such amused irony, has, as we have already said, lost nothing of his savour over the centuries. The writers we might call naturalist who describe the *Green Houses* refer to him often; such, for example, are Ihara Saikaku and Ejima Kiseki.

The amorous adventures of the warriors, princes, and lords are well-known. Murasaki Shikibu's novel *Genji Monogatari*, dating from the beginning of the 11th century, was read not only by the book-reading public but also by merchants and shopkeepers. It was popularized by story-books and by innumerable pictures—representing the handsome Genji, Genji the artist, the elegant Genji, Genji in love, so many likenesses of the perfect lover, yearning for love even when he suffers for it.

Mention cannot be made here of all the many heroes, but one at least kindled the imagination. This was Ariwara-no-Narihira, who lived in the 9th century and wrote the Tales of Ise, a series of poems linked by accounts of his deeds. He too was extremely handsome and his irresistible ardour has inspired many painters. No danger daunted him, and if he ever consulted the soothsayers it was merely to have his own views confirmed. He was banished, his mistress was imprisoned, but as they were in love they defied society. Pursued by soldiers carrying torches to set fire to the heath so as to drive him out from cover, he was saved by his sweetheart, who pleaded his cause in the name of love. They were allowed to escape, and he carried his beloved away on his back among the weeping willows. The episode of the bridge over the iris pond depicted in the beautiful painting by Ogata Korin at the beginning of the 18th century has a touching charm.

Kenko undoubtedly talked about women; indeed, even when criticizing them, he placed them above men. He was certainly not very much in sympathy with marriage: either the husband is mistaken about the qualities of his wife, or, attracted only by her beauty, finds himself living with a statue; or, the go-between and his family having united him to an insignificant woman, or one interested only in her house and babies, their married life degenerates into boredom, and sometimes even into loathing. In other words, the way is open for casual affairs.

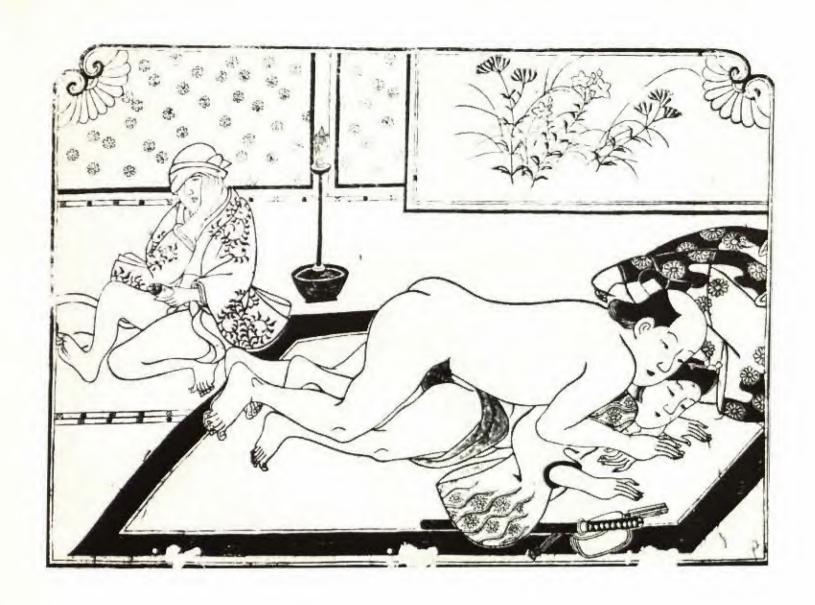




Nevertheless, woman thinks of nothing but love and leaves no stone unturned so as to please. Her attractiveness makes men forget everything. The hermit of Kume was a magician who could fly in the air, but he lost this power on perceiving the white limbs of a washerwoman—to such an extent do "a fine skin and well-rounded arms and legs wield a power of their own". It is said, remarks Kenko again, "that a rope made of the tresses of a woman's hair holds a huge elephant, and that a flute fashioned from



a wooden shoe worn by a woman unfailingly fetches the stags during the autumn rut." Our monk reacts against his weaknesses and launches into accusations: "How marvellous is woman, even though by









nature she is completely perverse! Deeply absorbed in herself, of an extreme covetousness, ignorant of the why and wherefore of things, her wits ever ready to wander, guileful in her words, refusing to answer the most harmless question (might this be prudence?), she thinks that with her ruses and her affectations she excels men in wisdom, and does not know that truth will out forthwith. Neither straightforward nor yet clever: such is woman." After this violent diatribe, Kenko recognized how seductive is woman when man, "her distracted slave", obeys her. He himself is attracted by the beauty of her hair and face, by the sound of her voice and her way of speaking. He cannot resist feminine charm, and it seems that, even when he upbraids it, it is to make it more attractive than ever.

As for famous lovers, we shall confine ourselves to a few examples of heroines in love, who have been popularized in pictures or by the theatre.

A very famous scroll painting, a play of the *kabuki* theatre of 1758, and a Noh play from the 15th century (*Dojoji*) recount the ancient legend of a woman in love who might well be *the Inviting Female* of mythology. She falls in love with a young and very handsome Buddhist priest whose chastity shocks her. All means seem fair to her; she pursues him on land, on sea, in the forests, and from temple to temple. When at last he returns to his monastery, he takes refuge under a new bell to be consecrated. She changes herself into a serpent, and, spitting flame, consumes him in his hiding-place.

At the other extreme is the story of Kesa Gozen, the virtuous woman who took her husband's place to die at an assassin's hand and whose body lies in the famous Tomb of Love.

Another example of faithfulness and exalted love is that of the Weaver and the Heavenly Cowherd, whom the gods banished to either side of the Milky Way to punish them for their amorous excesses, so that they meet only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month. This is the festival of Tanabata, still celebrated today.

And who in Japan does not know the story of Shizuka, the dancer, the mistress of Yoshitame? Yoritomo, the elder brother of Yoshitsune, sought his destruction and so captured Shizuka and compelled her to dance before him. But she escaped, and several kabuki plays tell the story of her magic tambourine and her dangerous voyage to rejoin her lover.

Or who does not know the story of Ono-no-Komachi, a refined poetess of the 9th century feted by the entire Court? Beautiful, attractive, and witty, she loved and was loved; she knew her own inconstancy and the inconstancy of men. A Noh play depicts her as follows: "She spread joy, her beauty shone like a flower, and the jet-black arch of her eyebrows reflected blue lights. The whiteness of her cheeks was never-fading. Innumerable, her fine damask robes billowed around her, overflowing the pavilions of precious wood. Her hair was upgathered in bluish waves, like clouds of vivid hue around a verdant peak. She resembled the lotus flower floating on the morning waves... on her wide sleeve the wine-filled cup cast the tranquil image of the moon in the starry sky." Komachi ended up by despising love and lovers. She made one of them pass a hundred nights beneath her window before she would agree to listen to him. The man died before the time was up and his ghost took vengeance on her, possessing her soul, reducing her to a state of beggary and sending her mad.

Mention must finally be made of the *kabuki* drama entitled "The Love Story of the Snow-Covered Gate", in which the courtesan Kurozome, who is none other than the spirit of the Black Cherry, avenges her lover through her magic gifts.

Two words have just been mentioned: ghosts and magic. We did not meet them with Kenko, whose mocking scepticism scarcely allows for what he considers pure superstition. Nevertheless, there is a great deal more in these two words than outmoded tales of long ago. It suffices to examine the public at the theatre, where ghosts frequently appear; not a smile is to be seen—on the contrary, there is a good deal of suspense. The Festival of the Dead, held on the 15th day of the seventh month, is celebrated throughout Japan. Some days before, fires are lit before the doors, as an invitation to the souls of the dead. In the evening, little floating lanterns are launched along the rivers, on the lakes, or in the sea. They represent souls returning to the kingdom of the dead. The huge fires lit on the slopes of Mount Hiei, at Kyoto, are not merely a tourist attraction. Even for the most sophisticated Japanese there is a communion that cannot be ignored between this world below and the beyond. Feelings as strong as love uphold and reinforce this belief.

Grandmothers have innumerable legends to tell on this subject. These obviously exercised even more power in the 17th and 18th centuries.



The ghosts of the dead, usually kindly but sometimes evil, wander for a long time on the face of the earth. Their character as spirits has been determined by their last thought before death, and they can always change themselves into human beings to assuage their passions. Story and drama generally delight in tales of jealousy and vengeance. We read in one story of the cunning of a lord who wished to behead one of his vassals. It had been pointed out to him that the spirit of his victim would pursue him relentlessly, so he devised a strategem. Taking advantage of the long harangues that precede execution ceremonies, he challenged his enemy to bite a rock when his head fell. This is what happened, and the satisfied lord remarked: "As you see, I made him concentrate his last thought on this rock, and if his spirit comes and haunts this place he will think of nothing else and forget about me."

Not every one can find such an easy way out.

The murdered courtesan Takao cast a spell on her sister Kasane, who had married her murderer. The ghost of O-Iwa haunted her guilty husband and induced him to kill the woman who had captured his heart (The Phantom of Yatzuya; Kabuki). Magic "bloodthirsty" swords are not uncommon. Animals themselves have avenging spirits, and woe to whoever kills the drake of a pair of mandarin ducks to brew a love philtre from its blood.

We may recall the variation on the stories of snake-women to be found in the *Ugetsu Monogatari* by Ueda Akinari (1734–1809). The rather ingenuous Toyoo, his mind stuffed with the classics, welcomed the very beautiful Manago, dressed in garments whose delicate colours were those of far-off mountains. She took him to a dream house full of treasure. Manago had actually died very young without having known love, and her ghost, sometimes in human form, sometimes secretly in the shape of a snake, was seeking the passion she had never known, even if it meant death to her chosen lover. By his firmness, Toyoo with the help of a Buddhist priest got the better of the demon, which fled under the earth.

Among the prints reproduced in this book the reader will find examples of these love-avid phantoms.

Against a background of such stories and beliefs, we can understand better the suicide pacts on which Japanese lovers decide when social circumstances keep them apart or honour is at stake. Suicide is committed joyfully, since the souls of the lovers will never again be separated and they can also count on the mercy of Amida for a welcome into the Land of Purity, the Paradise of the West. The plays





written for the *Kabuki* and the puppet theatre by the great dramatist Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724) depict several suicide pacts. They still make audiences of today weep. These pacts are not unknown in contemporary Japan.

Magic is not a monopoly of the spirits of the dead; it may also be found in the souls of the living. In the case of a violent passion, which is nearly always feminine jealousy, everything happens as though the spirit of the person greedy for vengeance becomes disembodied, leaving her without her being clearly aware of it and plunging the accursed victim into the agonies of death.

We have two examples of this in the *Tale of Genji*. Since youth the hero had been the lover of the princess Rokujo, the dictatorial and possessive widow of the Emperor's brother. She could not bear Genji's amorous escapades, especially when she suspected real attachment in them. Genji fell in love with the adorable Yugao, with whom he carried on a secret affair in a deserted house. In his last meeting with her, Genji surrendered to Rokujo's beauty and charm, and she went back with him through the flowers in the garden at dawn, wearing an exquisite green dress, her long tresses loose. Genji noticed neither the intent look of his mistress nor her anxiety. He met Yogao again and suddenly in the middle of the night a large and majestic woman appeared and said "What are you doing with this worthless creature, who can never be anything but a plaything picked up casually in the streets? I am dumbfounded and very displeased." With these words the apparition tried to snatch Yugao from the arms of her lover. Genji thought he was having a nightmare, but soon realized that Yugao was possessed by a spirit. She was seized with trembling, swooned away, and died. For a moment, Genji saw floating near the pillow the demoniacal spirit that had killed her, which was none other than the spirit of Rokujo.

The same drama occurred with Aoi, the hero's own wife. This time to Rokujo's habitual jealousy were added squabbles about precedence. Aoi gave birth to a beautiful boy, but an evil spirit seemed to have taken possession of her. Genji, who had plenty of sins to be forgiven, asked for ritual exorcising and summoned the chief diviners. Aoi, who felt an evil spirit in herself, little by little surrendered to it. Rokujo pitied her with great sincerity, but Genji, who had guessed the cause of the trouble, reproached her and opened her eyes to the truth. He reminded her that she had dreamt of the room where Aoi slept and in her nightmares had rushed at the invalid in a rage. Rokujo trembled with fear. Without her knowing or being able to prevent it, her fiercely jealous soul had left her body in order to overwhelm

Aoi. Prayers were useless. Aoi died of suffocation. Rokujo lost her lover once and for all. Thus the evil spells of the living may be as great as those of the dead.

All this magic, which filled the minds of the people and was usually connected with love, was encouraged by Buddhism in general and by the Shingon sect in particular. We shall not spend time on fundamental dogmas remote from our subject. Suffice it to say that with Shingon, tantric mysteries crept into Buddhism; in other words, India, through the intermediary of China, made a greater mark upon Japan. All beings, all things have a nature identical with that of the supreme Buddha Dainichi-Nyorai, the Great Illuminator, who was easily assimilated in the beliefs of the people with the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu of the Shinto cult. It should also be mentioned that when Kyoto was founded, only the Shingon sect was authorized to install itself in the capital; there has always been one of its temples within the Imperial precincts. The esotericism and symbols of the sect were undoubtedly not understood by the uninitiated, but the splendour of the ceremonies and secrecy of some rites attracted the faithful to the steep slopes of mount Koya, site of the principal temples and of an immense necropolis. Magic was still involved, both on the lofty plane of philosophical speculation and on the much lower plane of human hopes. Naturally, apart from an élite of priests, other clerics of less ardent zeal were only too willing to play at miraclemongering, when not engaged purely and simply in trafficking in spells and charms. The frightening appearance of the gods of the tantric pantheon, far from being a discouragement, seemed rather to be a manifestation of their power.

The God of Love, Aizen Myoo, is to be found among the Kings, but not with the five Kings of Knowledge. The Shingon sect generally exalted passion and by no means sought to curb it; on the contrary, it considered that in passion there is a force of self-sublimation that, transcending itself, attains Awakening, the first stage of Illumination. Aizen Myoo particularly encourages the passion of love; he possesses the knowledge of how to attract. Demiéville's work, *Hobogirin*, unfortunately unfinished, describes him exactly. Substantially, it says that this god represents sublimated love with a deep substratum of eroticism; vulgar passion he destroys and in its place arouses a stronger and better love,













which embraces the whole universe with equal ardour and leads to salvation. A formula in his teaching contains his doctrine in a nutshell: "That state of ecstasy must be attained from which all obstruction of the passions have been removed. The passions are manifest in Error and expelled by the Awakening, just as the stallion's organ appears only at the moment of sexual excitement and immediately afterwards is hidden." It is easy to guess at all the erotic interpretations that inevitably accompanied such a saying. Zen is frequently thought of as the masculine element and Ai as the feminine counterpart, since the man feels attracted (Zen) to the woman, but the woman loves (Ai) the man.

Aizen Myoo is not an easy-going or welcoming god. His body is the colour of the sun's rays; he stands in a fiery wheel, and the look from his three eyes is angry. He has a lion's mane topped by a five-pointed cross; his bristly hair gives him an appearance of irritation, and garlands of five colours hang from his head. Sacred veils cover his ears. In the highest of his three left hands he holds a little gold bell, in the highest of his three right hands a five-pointed diamond. In his middle left hand he carries a diamond bow and in his right a diamond arrow, as though he were shooting starlight to create the essence of the Great Attraction. His lower left hand holds the jewel. Seated cross-legged on a red lotus placed in a precious vase overflowing with jewels, he is indeed a formidable presence. During the ceremonies consecrated to him, his effigy in red is placed on a red dais and all the officiating priests are dressed in red. The ceremonies held at the Imperial palace from the 11th century on were intended to allay evil, increase good, and encourage sorcery, the great exorcisms, and "the Terrible Practice" (Abisharoka), libations and rites designed to subjugate beings.

There are plenty of ambiguities in the attributes of this god. The most obvious is that the Greek Eros had a bow and so had the Indian God of Love. All the others look remarkably like love magic, even if the final goal is to orientate passion towards the awakening. The manifestation of the cult and the expressions used do not leave the slightest doubt about its erotic basis: "Bonds and web of love, the love juice moistening the area of the act and hastening its consummation."

From the Shingon sect, Aizen Myoo passed into the powerful Tendai sect and was in due course adopted by the popular Nichiren sect. For the people as a whole he remains the God of Love, and his terrifying appearance merely conjures up the transports of passion; his effigy used to be found in the red light districts, in the homes of prostitutes, in the tea houses, and in the homes of singers and merchants.

The effigy of another god is to be found in these same places: Shoten (Daisho Kangiten), a Japanese version of an Indian god with two bodies and the head of the elephant Ganesh. The two bodies are intwined in a violent embrace, the male body vigorous and invincible, the female dallying with that strength which she absorbs. The Shingon sect calls this the Great and Noble God of Joy. His ceremonies remain secret and mysterious, and keep his followers in a holy but alluring dread.

Such are the Japanese erotic reactions to various forms of religion; such is the complexity of this eroticism, all of whose elements are found in their novels, theatre, and works of art. Sensuality for sensuality's sake is never curbed, and the quest for pleasures of the flesh, of whatever kind, seems perfectly natural.

Sodomy has been characterized in Europe as the "Italian Vice". In Japan the word vice is neither uttered nor hinted at: sodomy is a sexual pleasure like others. In the temple museum of the Shingon sect at Daigo, near Kyoto, there is a huge scroll painting, which modern prudery hides from indiscreet eyes. It shows the "games" of the priests, from the delicate preliminaries to the acts themselves: indecency in its pure state. But the refinement and accuracy of the drawing and the realistic portrayal of the poses seem to indicate that the painter must have enjoyed himself enormously and that the whole monastery must have laughed greatly at it without worrying about what we would call its pornography. These somewhat isolated male communities, completely deprived of feminine company, coped in this way with their sexual urges, the young novices being the love objects in these perverted affairs. Kenko tells an amusing story about this. A lad in the service of a canon assiduously visited a certain person in the neighbourhood. The canon asked him who he was, a layman or a priest. The lad, drawing his sleeves across his chest, replied: "To tell the truth, I don't know what he is. I have never seen his face." Kenko adds this jovial comment, which speaks volumes: "How did it come about that it was only his face that he had never seen?"

There are also the quips the priests used to make about Manju-Shiri, that is, the Boddhisatva Manjushri, who astride a lion accompanied the Buddha Shakyamuni at his left side. By one of those plays on words so common in Japan, the priests only kept Shiri out of his name; this means "behind",



and they therefore endowed him with homosexual leanings, denying his fitness to judge of normal love.

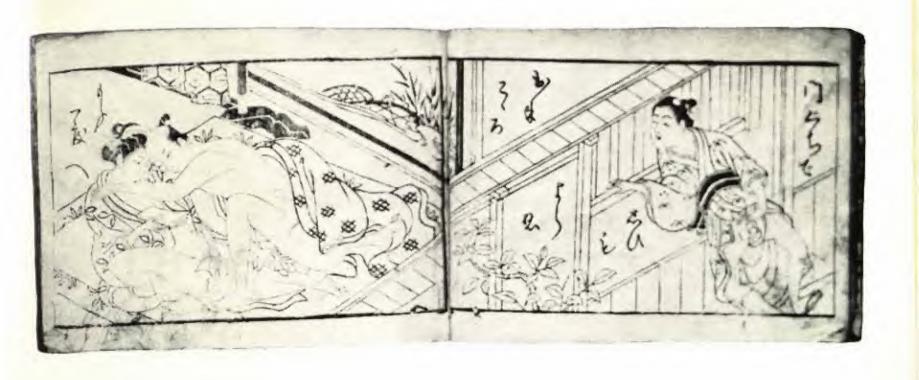
A pseudo-erudite, pseudo-sacred, and (in fine) pretty hypocritical excuse was found for homosexual love among men.

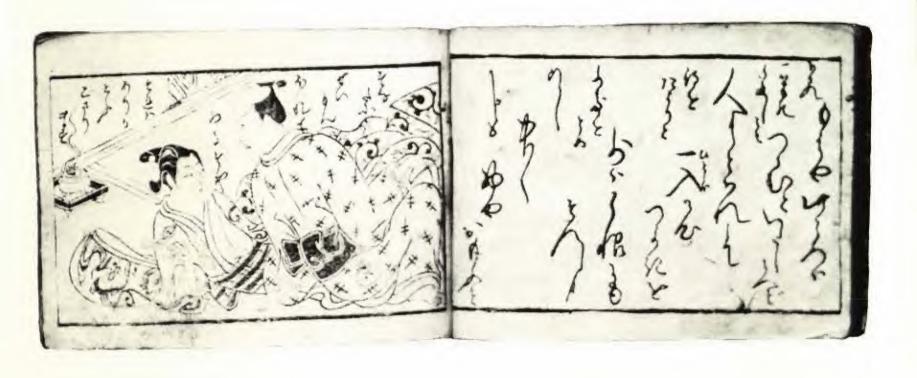
The morals of the warrior class were a matter of course. They affected to despise women and had "special friendships" among their companions in arms, and also among young men of little fighting quality who were carefully recruited for their good looks. Those of Kagoshima, to the extreme south of Kyushu, were positively celebrated, and the Way of the Young Men, Wakashu-do, seemed extremely normal.

When the *kabuki* theatre was founded at the end of the 16th century by, it is said, a priestess of the Great Temple of Izumo called O-Kuni, it had an extraordinary success. She set up her stage on the dried bed of the river of Kyoto, the Kamo. She enticed many young girls, attracted by the acting profession, both to the capital and to Edo, that is, Tokyo. People crowded round the new theatre, and soon it was difficult to know whether the enthusiasm it engendered was due to its theatrical charms or to the intrigues carried on with the pretty actresses. In 1629 the Government forbade women to appear on the stage, and from then on only men played the parts, the female as well as the male. Famous artists went so far as to dress constantly as women and wear all the usual female knick-knacks. A morality to suit became established and, as no one was shocked by it, persisted.

Young men in search of love or a patron became very numerous around the theatres. They did not shave their foreheads, and when in 1652 an attempt was made to compel them to wear their hair cut like men's and leave their foreheads bare, many of them refused; while others wore a wig. It was common practice, as Ihara Saikaku shows in his novels, to advise anyone who was young and had any good looks to seek his fortune by the beauty of his body.

One of the stories of this late 17th-century writer, in his collection Five Women who loved Love, is called Gengobei and extols homosexual love. The hero idolizes a young man whose grace equals "that of the half-open buds of the cherry tree". In the spring, when the scent of the plum trees perfumed the air, the two lovers would begin a night of passion with a duet on the flute. Nothing could equal their tenderness. But the beloved dies; the grief-stricken Gengobei vows to keep mourning for three years and sets off on a pilgrimage to the Shingon temples on Mount Koya. On his way he meets the most beautiful boy in the world and follows him to his father's palace; there "they love one another for a night worth

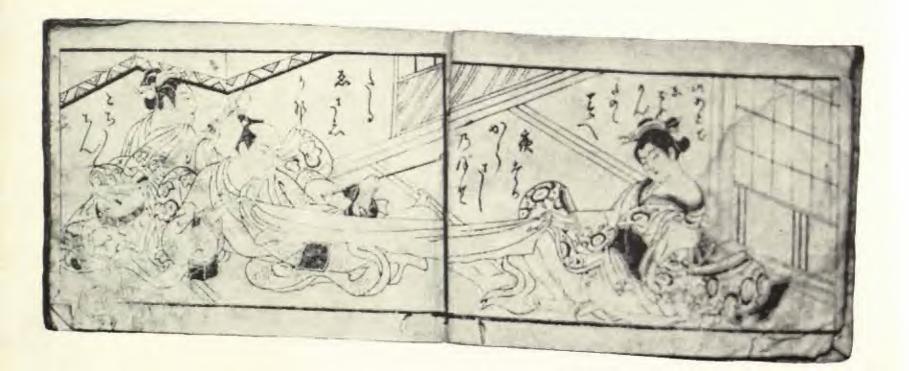












a thousand others". Weeping, Gengobei leaves his new love and completes his pilgrimage, but on his return finds only the old father; the boy is dead, "like a flower that falls from the hand carrying it".

Gengobei becomes a hermit and takes up his abode on the mountains overlooking Kagoshima, swearing that he will keep his vows. The foolish fellow had not reckoned on the love a young girl bears for him, a girl "whose beauty surpassed that of the moon on the sixteenth night". Her letters remaining unanswered, she decides to go and see this odd young man, and, dressed as a boy, braves the rocky paths and shaky bridges across the waterfalls. She reaches the hermitage and, while waiting for the monk, reads the only book to be found in the hut, a manual of pederasty. The spirits of the two previous lovers try in vain to restrain Gengobei; he is once more captivated, swearing that he has promised Buddha everything except to give up the primary pleasures. The girl, O-man, extracts a written promise from him not to love anyone more but her. The end is easy to guess. The disguise is discovered and the hermit, "deciding that the difference is not so much", forgets his religious oaths. All ends well, for the parents of the young girl forgive the escapade and leave this somewhat ambiguous couple all the wealth they have amassed.

Here again we find not only the pursuit of unconventional pleasures, we find also love, feeling, the cult of beauty, and a high degree of refinement.

Lesbian relationships were certainly not unknown in the *Green Houses*, where all kinds of sexual pleasures were permissible, but they are neither mentioned in any of the known texts nor portrayed in the prints, apart from a few instances in communal orgies. On the other hand, solitary pleasure-seeking, impatient anticipation, and unbridled imagination are often noted and drawn, without being given the least trace of furtiveness.

So, from the legends of the *Inviting Female* to the gods of magic Aizen Myoo or Shoten, eroticism insinuates itself into every aspect of life or, more exactly, blends with life.

It might be wondered why the artistic manifestations of this eroticism became particularly marked from the 17th century onwards. Not that there was at that moment a kind of sexual upsurge. Sexuality

always remains the same—you cannot change a nation—but it appeared openly in literature, in the theatre, and in art; it was concentrated, in appearance at least, in the red light districts, which were open to a very motley public. There are many reasons for this change.

First of all it was an urban phenomenon. Nothing had changed in the villages and country. Sexual freedom remained. The singing and dancing of the young men and women continued to enliven all the festivals, bringing together fresh couples, not all of whom were formally bound by matrimony. For proof it is not necessary to look any further than the *Bon Odiri* rounds at the Festival of the Dead, held today between the 13th and 15th of August of the solar calendar. These rounds, particularly common in the larger rural villages, are intended to comfort the spirits of the dead paying friendly visits to the living. The young girls wear a large rush hat or even a hood that reveals only their eyes. The crowd mixes with the dancers perpetuating the tradition, dating back to the 10th century, of the Amida dances, which are particularly gay and noisy. Not very long ago these dances took place round a pillar or decorated wooden lance; here one can see vestiges of the myths of Izanagi and Izanami. People drink, enjoy themselves, and at night make love. The souls of the dead will return contented.

The same freedom of relations between men and women was found among the landed aristocrats and even at the court or among the associates of the shoguns. Yoshimasa, who died at the end of the 15th century, was well known for his dissipations and his numerous favourites.

Finally the so-called tea houses, which supply their clients with hostesses and prostitutes of every kind, have not disappeared, especially where rivers meet on their way to the sea and boatmen and travellers can find lodging. The Tokaido road, between Kyoto, Kamakura, and Edo (Tokyo) was full of inns at all the stopping places. The paintings and prints that interest us before Hiroshige depict neither the country people nor these scattered tea houses. They must be mentioned, however, to show that the rise of erotic art meant neither a break nor even something new, but the continuity of an old tradition.

The whole of the period that began with the struggle between the Heike and the Minamoto (the latter winning in 1185) and scarcely ended before the late 16th century was eventful and witnessed a pro-







found social change. Never had the Buddist concept of Impermanence been so well confirmed. Depending on the swings of defeat and victory, of lootings and confiscations, all fortune was hazardous, and more than one great family, reduced to extreme poverty, was obliged to scatter. Absolutely typical are the stories of the little port of Eguchi on the river Yodo near Osaka, where sea junks and river barges put in. A famous Noh called Eguchi tells of the celebrated monk Saigyo being surprised by a storm and forced to seek shelter from a courtesan. The lady who opens the door to him is also a great poet and the night is spent in impromptu versifying. This was the end of the 12th century, when, as Eigi Yoshikawa has pointed out in his biographical novel about the Heike, many hostesses and courtesans in Eguchi had tasted the refinements of the court at Kyoto before being reduced to exercising their profession. The story of the lady of Eguchi, popularized in painting and prints, presages the great courtesans of the *Green Houses*, whose beauty was allied to undoubted literary or artistic talent.

Kenko's reflections have already informed us of the social upheavals caused by the arrival, in the midst of the effete refinements of the Imperial courts, of the warriors from the East, of aggressive if somewhat coarse virility. Kenko mocks the brutality of these intruders, but acknowledges that they represent the future. This showed clearly when the Emperor Go-Daigo quixotically attempted a restoration of personal power against them. Civil war broke out and lasted practically two centuries, with short remissions. The new completely feudal ruling class replaced the ancient Court nobility, now ruined, but the two societies were not slow in merging. The barons from the East and the central provinces were absorbed into the great Japanese civilization. This was something that in fact they desired passionately, for in their rustic mind they understood that, in spite of their strength and their wealth, the carousals and sexual orgies that took place at Kamakura would bring more contempt than admiration on their heads.

The polish that these upstart and ambitious men were trying to acquire was cracking all over; try as they might to behave correctly and with good manners, as they took everything literally they would often make fools of themselves and give the impression of peasants in their Sunday best.

Little by little, however, in the intervals between their warlike escapades, they acquired a taste for elegance, culture, and artistic values, but they never managed to rid themselves of a tendency to osten-





tatiousness, as is well illustrated by the rather showy magnificence of the late 16th-century castles and palaces of Hideyoshi.

If the fate of the ancient nobility was not always enviable, many of the military caste went through equally difficult times. The establishment of peace at the beginning of the 17th century sounded the knell of this caste. There was no more point in unconditional loyalty to the clan, family, or chief, in the absolute devotion that feudal honour represented. The authoritarian government of the Tokugawa, based on an omnipresent police force, kept under close surveillance the great daimyos, the lords



who held important fiefs, anyone who was rich or merely comfortably off. Words, acts, and gestures were all spied upon and reported back. The nobles, who were frequently called to Tokyo, could not leave the new capital unless they left behind some member of their family as a hostage.

All foreign travel was forbidden on pain of death, and visits between great daimyos were not encouraged. The daimyos kept a nucleus of troops around them, but, being unable to support them, were obliged to dismiss numerous samurais. The unemployed samurais formed the far from negligible class



of ronins, and they had permanently the right to wear two swords. They took service when the opportunity arose, in the bands of militia suppressing brigandage, but sometimes they joined the thieves or smugglers. When better behaved, they had to content themselves with the minor crafts, since for them trade was the most terrible of come-downs. With haughty pride they kept their memories of past battles and exploits, with poverty, always a poor adviser, lying in wait for them.

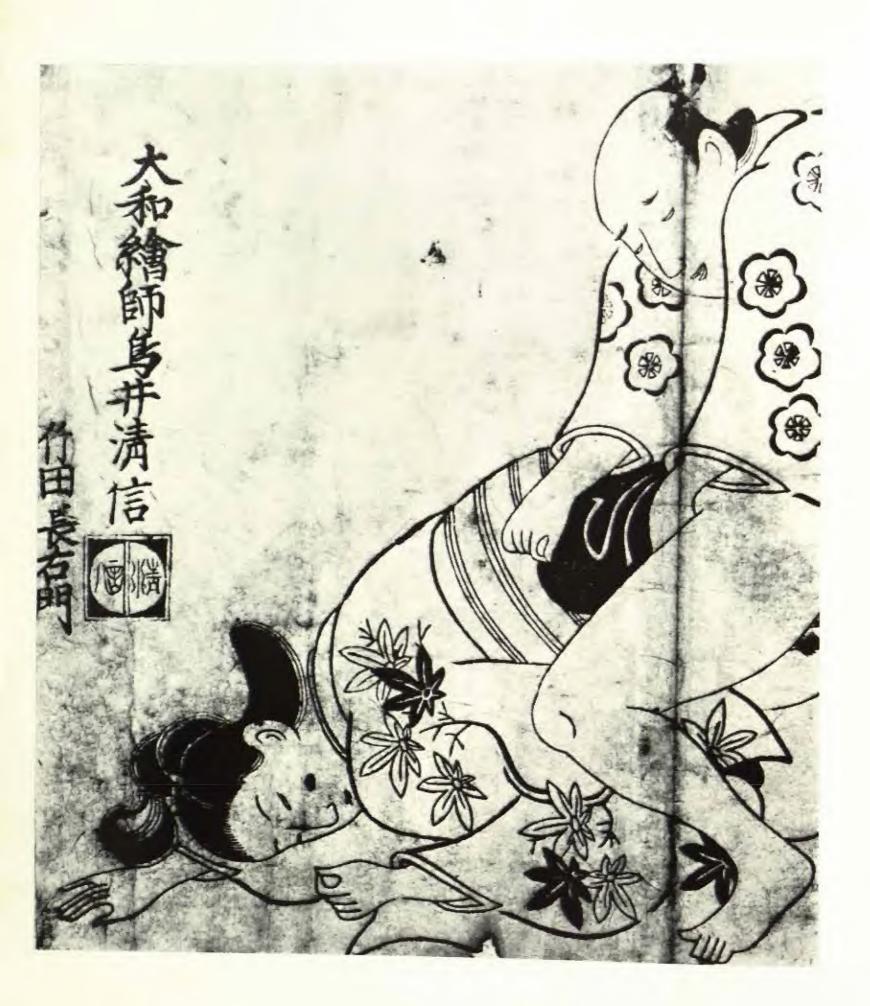












On the other hand—and this is the most important phenomenon of the period—we witness the extraordinary rise of the merchant classes. While civil disorder had at times inconvenienced them, it had
not ruined them, except for a few unlucky people. The wars kept the powerful occupied and killed off
the little people, but fortunes merely changed hands, and in the process a boundless taste for luxury
developed. No one who knew how to speculate and sell at the right moment had anything to suffer from
in these situations. Not only did towns like Nara, Kyoto, Kamakura, and Edo (Tokyo) witness an
increase in their population from the 17th century on, but Osaka, its neighbouring port of Sakai, and
even Otsu on the lake of Biwa, not to mention the ports of Kyushu, assumed major importance. The
peasants were also gradually emancipated, not so much by rebellion, which was cruelly repressed,
as by organizing themselves into powerful guilds in contact with the merchant guilds of the
cities and by buying up the lands of the dispossessed. The first rich farmers made their appearance
at this time.

The ports of Nagasaki, Hakata, Sakai, and Hyogo (Kobe) had long since become immensely wealthy owing to the maritime trade with China, and shortly before, with Europe, through the intermediary of the Dutch, stationed at Deshima, and also owing to the piracy of the Japanese sailors in Korea and at the mouth of the Yangtze Kiang. Gamo Kumpei, an erudite writer of this time, is said to have stated that: "When the rich merchants of Osaka become annoyed, the daimyos tremble throughout Japan." In fact, Hikeyoshi had to use force and cunning to take back from Sakai the franchises that this port had seized rather than obtained.

The craftsmen also enjoyed an unheard-of prosperity. New gold and silver mines were opened towards the middle of the 16th century and the goldsmiths and silversmiths did well out of them; iron remained scarce but sufficed for needs; the spinners, weavers, and embroiderers disposed easily of their wares and vied with each other in the variety and colour of their sumptous silks. Exchange with the hinterland was organized systematically, and money transfers were facilitated by special banks and private post offices. The rice storehouses were overflowing.

The chonin, the rich land-owning or trading bourgeois, even though he had the right to carry only one sword, was the most important person in the community and did not deny himself any luxury. The Tokugawa could affect to despise these upstarts and repeat the Confucian maxim that riches, like oil, defile, but they had to reckon with this new power, which at least had the merit of presenting no danger

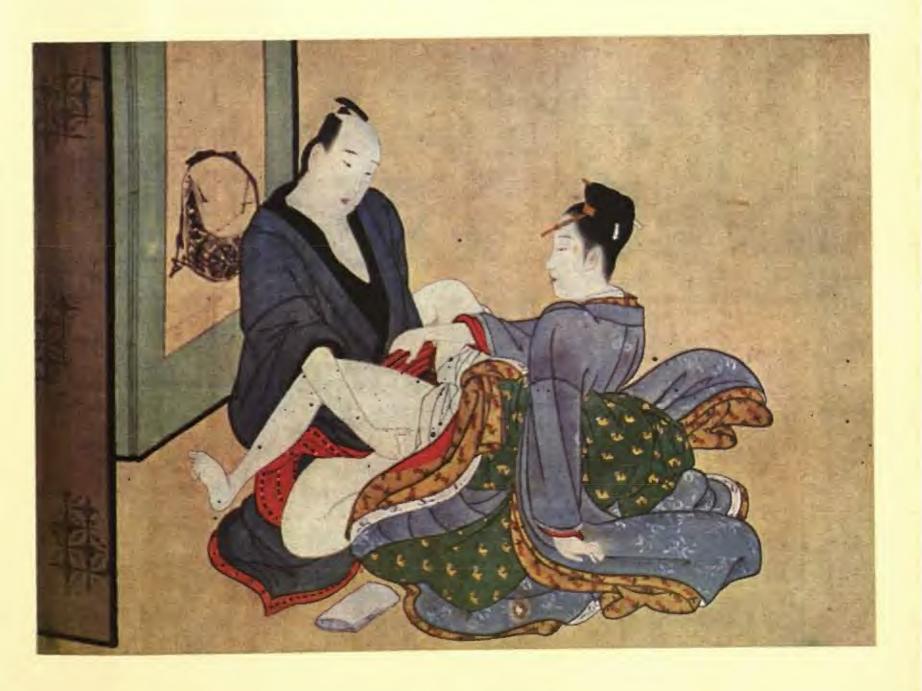
to them. And Confucius was not against enrichment in which people might find happiness. So the sumptuary laws, representing as they did fits of temper and perhaps of jealousy, remained sporadic and without effect.

In any case, all that the Tokugawa demanded was total obedience, and this was obtained by a skilful partitioning of the country. The watertight compartments established between the classes of society enclosed the entire Japanese people in a tightly knit network. Confucianism and Chinese ways



of thought had already shaped the administrative rules. The Edo Government then spread the Chu-Hi doctrine because it was suited to reinforcing their power.

For quite some time marriages had been arranged by intermediaries, after terms had been agreed between the families, without husband or wife ever meeting each other until the wedding. Even in the country, where there had been great freedom, the system was gaining ground. Filial piety, in the Chinese manner, meant the omnipotence of the head of the family, whether he was the father or the older





brother, and the woman, subjugated to her husband, had to bear the yoke of her parents-in-law and especially her mother-in-law. Plays describe these private dramas, the divorces, the forced repudiations. There was even greater harshness among the upper classes, where an adulterous wife was immediately put to death. The new Bakufu merely enforced these rules.

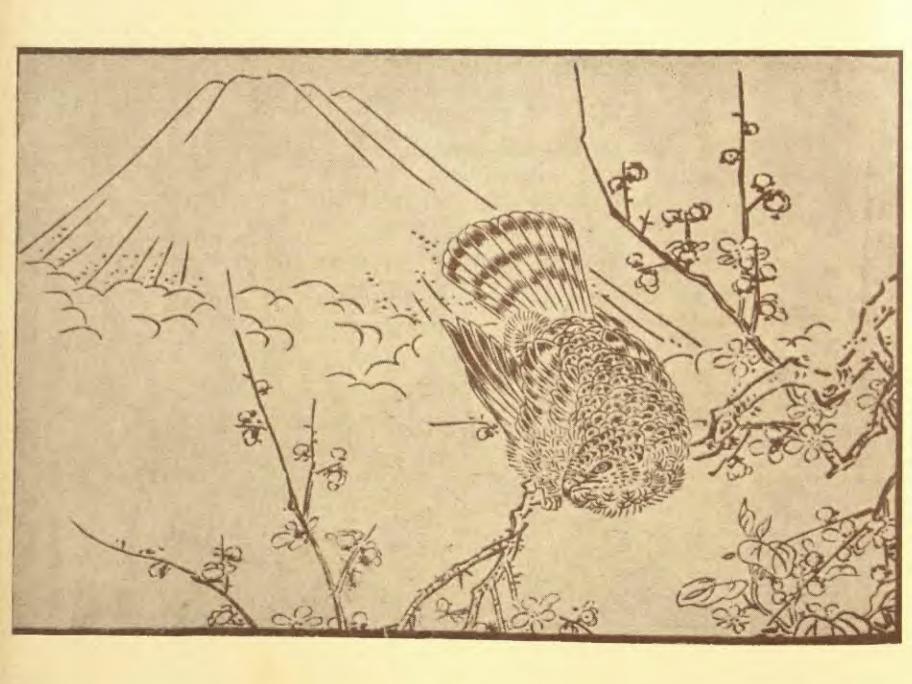
In his work Manners and Customs of Japan, B. H. Chamberlain cites the treatise entitled Important Precepts for Women, by Kaibara, a moralist of the 18th century. A few extracts will suffice to give us a clear idea of it: "If, through excess of affection, the parents of a young girl have allowed her to become wilful, she will inevitably be capricious in her husband's house and alienate his affection. If the father-in-law is a man of principle the burden will seem intolerable to her. She will hate and blame her father-in-law and it will all end in her being sent away from her husband's home covered with shame. A virtuous character is more precious in a woman than a beautiful face. The heart of the vicious woman is always angry, she looks savagely around her; her rages, hard words, and common accent, her words of disparagement and mockery quench all the qualities necessary: sweetness, obedience, chastity, compassion, and calmness."

Among the prohibitions, mention might be made of those that concern all contact with another man, all friendship or intimacies with anyone at all, lasciviousness and jealousy, consultations with clairvoyants or fortune-tellers, ostentatiousness in hair style or clothing, disobedience, and scandal-mongering. The penalty for breaking these prohibitions was divorce or repudiation pure and simple. The wife is the frugal housewife, the mother of the children who will support the family, boys being preferred to girls. The husband is the all-powerful lord "who is heaven itself" and to whom everything is permissible. His wife is literally nothing but his "shadow", and if her husband is dissolute she can do no more than try and reason with him discreetly.

It must be repeated that this harsh code was not so rigorously enforced in the lower classes of society and among the peasants, but it retained its full power in families of note and among those whom newly acquired wealth had raised, at least in appearance, to a higher rank.

There certainly were other manuals for young wives of a much less austere character, in which the acts of love were duly explained and which contained a sort of outline of the art of holding a husband by sensual means. In them, nevertheless, total obedience remained the essential virtue.

The sacrifice of the woman, whose merit consisted in hardly more than looking after the house and producing children, had as a corollary the freedom of the man. This freedom was the greater because he





















had not himself chosen the wife and in most cases encountered with her nothing but trivial domestic annoyances, a mild sexual attraction, a house whose cleanliness did not compensate for its ordinariness, and dreary conversation that was hardly likely to stimulate the imagination—in fine, unrelieved boredom.

The Japanese male has always remained the same. His sensuality was always on the alert, and he had a taste for the pleasures of the flesh that the recent troubles had only increased, a pressing need for amorous adventures and even love; he was attracted to beauty—the beauty of women, the beauty of the materials clothing her, of the background in which she lived, of the talents she exercised in all the realms of art and of literature.

There is another factor that should not be underestimated. The man frequenting the pleasure districts had money, honestly or dishonestly acquired. He considered himself wealthy; he could imitate the manners of the privileged classes and imagine he had reached a higher rank when he too had sampled the luxury of the celebrated courtesans. It was probably an illusion, but it is an illusion that is sustained by the equality of all men in such a place, whatever their origin. The samurai were no better received than the *chonin*, and sword thrusts were not tolerated by a vigilant police.

How could this manifold attraction be resisted, of sexuality and feeling, of escape from everyday life, of the temptations of pride and vanity?

There were other ways out as well as the red-light districts for those who were trying to escape. It is remarkable that while the merchants and craftsmen earned plenty of money they also improved their minds. The great State universities were closed to them, but a large number of private schools and teachers spread Japanese culture. This is one of the basic characteristics of Japan. Long before the introduction of general education the Japanese were great readers, when their often very scanty means enabled them to acquire the necessary knowledge. The Japanese classics had never been very rare or very expensive. As well, a modern literature was in the making. The Hachimonjiya bookshop at Osaka had published numerous contemporary novels, and you have only to consult the catalogue of publications of the time (called the *Genroku*) to realize the extent of this spread of literature. The *Ukiyo-Zoshi*,

realistic tales of the manners of the time, included, for example, The Everlasting Storehouse of the Riches of Japan, in which Saikaku described the manners of the merchants, as well as erotic novels by the same author such as Five Women who Loved Love; The Life of a Woman of Pleasure (which could also be called "The Sensual Enslavement of a Woman" or "The Greatness and Fall of a Courtesan"); the Life of a Woman who Loved Pleasure, with its sequel The Life of a Man Who Loved Pleasure; Voluptuous Dances in the Floating World; and finally perhaps The Great Mirror of the Pleasures. These books were nearly always illustrated by lively and amusing drawings, as realistic as the text. In anticipation of more substantial pleasures, the imagination preoccupied with sex found in them choice material on which to feed.

Sentimentality was the attribute of the singers of the *Utazaimon* or *Songs on Touching Subjects*. These singers sang what we would call laments or romantic ballads. They performed in all the tea houses, where famous tellers of epic or love stories were also to be found, and their talents brought the people flocking. Nor should the poetry contests be forgotten; they were held among friends round a cup of sake, and they have always had great success. "Who in Japan is not a poet?" asked Lafcadio Hearn.

Finally, there was the theatre, which played a vital part in Japanese life.

Firstly the Noh, whose origins were supposed to go back to the goddess Usume. In fact it started during the Muromachi period; writers like Kwan-Ami (1333-1384) and his son Seami (1363-1444) fixed its rules. Noel Péri tries to define it as follows: "The most suitable definition would undoubtedly be *lyrical drama*, provided that the word drama was taken to mean action in the general sense. Such a definition must obviously not be taken to suggest any affinity with our modern lyrical drama; among other fundamental differences, the lyricism of the latter is primarily musical, while that of the Noh is mainly poetic, asking nothing more of music than what all lyricism asks as a first requirement, an external rhythm to sustain it and relatively unvarying musical quality as a basis for the development and completion of its phrases".

The rhythm Noel Péri speaks of is in reality very slow, and what is called a dance is much more like a hieratic march, with a great variety of gestures of a symbolic character. What is sought is formal beauty through a highly refined form of mime. The subjects are religious or legendary, full of appearances of gods, spirits, and phantoms of all sorts. For the connoisseur, and even for some one prepared, however slightly, for the spectacle, the Noh creates an atmosphere of spiritual tension and marvellous unreality. The samurai affected to go to no other than the Noh theatre, and the Noh was undoubtedly a

little difficult for the chonin, who nevertheless did not miss many of the shows, for every cultivated man or man with pretensions to culture had to be able to recite passages. Between two dramas, the comic interludes, the kyogen, provided the public with relaxation. These were coarse, burlesque farces, originating in the frank gaiety of the people and characterized by a joyous irreverence towards the established powers, almost caricaturing them—lords, priests, and even spirits.

Another kind of theatre peculiar to Japan is the puppet theatre, the *joruri*. Beside the stage, a reciter and a choir chant with a shamisen accompaniment. On the stage itself, incredibly skilful manipulators animate large jointed puppets which mime, or, it should really be said, act the spoken words. It is hard to say which should be admired most, the skill of the reciter or of the manipulators; the illusion is complete. The success of this theatre, founded at the beginning of the 17th century, has continued up to the present time, and for good reason. At the period in which we are interested, Chikamatsu Monzaemon wrote the best *Joruri* plays, which were often used again for the *kabuki*. The subjects were sometimes taken from stories of famous heroes, sometimes from contemporary life. This was



another piece of escapism for the spectator, no longer into the mysterious world of the Noh, but into that of frank, brave warriors and pitiless but sentimental swordsmen, or into that of the contemporary world, where love held so important a place.

The kabuki exercised a similar attraction, but its realism, the splendour of the décor and the costumes, and the expressionistic acting destined it especially for the humbler classes. They might be termed great theatrical spectacles, and they are sometimes akin to melodrama, sometimes at the limit of good taste, but always very impressive. We have already referred to this theatre, which until the prohibition of 1629 was run by women, and we said that a great deal of pederasty went on around the kabuki. It must also be said that the leading actors, whether men or men taking females role, were the object of inordinate admiration. The albums of prints by Sharaku showing the best of them in their most spectacular poses delighted the lovers of art. A great scandal burst out at Court when one of the ladies in waiting fell in love with a celebrated actor, but there were many women-and men- who wore the emblems of their favourite actors embroidered on their kimonos. The atmosphere in the kabuki theatre was overcharged; the crowd was over-excited or tearful, the colours on the stage formed a dazzling kaleidoscope, the violence of the fighting was stimulated by wild acrobatics, feelings were pushed to a climax, heads were cut off, there were trophies of vengeance or victory and ghostly apparitions. Nothing was lacking to provide erotic stimulation: neither the presence of the great-hearted courtesans in the most spectacular roles, nor the swaggering poses and gestures and thundering grandiloquence of the actors, nor the desire kindled in the eyes of men and women, nor the temptations shamelessly offered by charming young men.

Some of the prints show that when people came out of these spectacles swords were often drawn in the scouffle that took place.

There were other pleasures as well as illustrated books and theatres: among them a tasteful room in a tea house; a reunion of friends; dainty morsels washed down with sake; and jesting and good stories. This is where the geisha came in with her charm, grace, liveliness, and talent. The geisha is found in











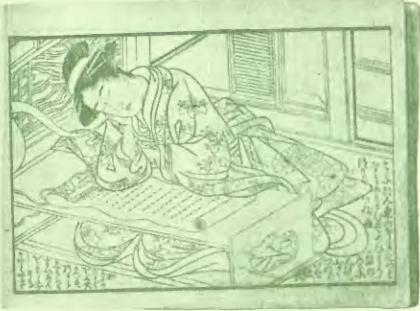




















love, a free artist who did not tolerate any unseemly familiarities. She was well educated and well aquainted with everything going on in literature, music, and dancing. She undoubtedly had a male protector, to whom it was an honour to offer her the finest attire, designed for her by the greatest artists and woven by the best craftsmen. To be the patron of a distinguished geisha established a man's taste and gave him standing. The geisha knew the art of pouring out wine, and, by the brilliance of her wit, could revive a flagging conversation. Patronized by clients of different occupations, she knew many secrets; could act as a go-between either in business or in political intrigues; and could bring together round her rivals or enemies who were very glad to sound out their adversaries informally. The geisha thus played an uncontested social role and represented a sort of perfectly respectable institution. Geishas had even become legitimate wives of the great and appeared in high society. They usually lived outside the red light districts, and if by any chance they lived within them, they were never seen inside the *Green Houses*. The demarcation between geisha and courtesan was so rigid that a geisha who openly sold her favours was exposed naked in front of the guild jail. Every one to his trade, indeed!

The geisha district at Kyoto, the Gion, still keeps its prestige, and the spring dances, Miyako Odori, executed by the geishas in their own theatre, are one of the great events of city life.

We need not go so far as to believe that the rich merchant entertaining his friends was inviting them to a purely cultural celebration. If he took the trouble to have the most celebrated geishas present, he was thereby increasing his personal prestige, at the same time giving those whom he was honouring with the appellation of connoisseurs the opportunity to appreciate feminine charm and the worth of great artistry. In fact the geisha sings and dances; but she can also entertain the guests by making them share in amusing rounds. She can sing classical airs as well as popular songs; and dance classical dances, such as those of the *Four Seasons*, or more familiar mimed dances. If she trusts you, the geisha might give her dance a more voluptuous or even a lascivious character. I once had the opportunity to see this kind of dance: a woman ardently in love waiting for her lover. The movements were, so to speak, both passionate and stylized; everything had meaning, and the dance might be said to have been realistic and yet restrained. Only a very great artist is capable of such a performance.



The merchant Jihei whom Chikamatsu Monzaemon depicts in his play Double Suicide at Imajima has committed many acts of folly because of the courtesan Koharu and is seized with repentance. He swears never to go near the Green House district again, and really thinks he is strong enough to resist temptation. He goes out to settle a business matter but, as though driven by an irresistible and mysterious force, he feels himself without wishing it drawn towards the delicious hell "where night is unknown". He at least has the excuse of his infatuation; he knows but loves the madness of it, even though it will certainly end in his death.

How many others have crossed the threshold of the brothels with him, impelled only by carnal desire? No matter how much they attribute to the aphrodisiac (some powder of roasted water-lizard) surreptitiously slipped into their drink; no matter how much they hum the poetic commonplaces such as Koigousa, the Plants of Love, where the violence of sexual instinct is compared to the growth of plants, or blame "the grasses tied in sheaves", where the idea is put more clearly—what is concerned is indubitably sexuality, and prostitution too.

Control of the brothel areas dates from the Muromachi period, i.e., the second half of the 16th century. The Tokugawa merely defined and organized it. Every town of any importance therefore restricted its brothels to a specified area within an enclosure, with one main street intersected by five or seven secondary streets. A gateway guarded by sentries marked the entrance. At Kyoto, there was the Shimabara quarter; at Osaka, the Shimmachi, then the Sonezaki Shinshi; at Edo (Tokyo) the Yoshiwara, then the Fukagawa. The houses, as was proper, and also their inhabitants were classified into five categories, and it was not possible to rise from one category to the next. It does not take much to guess that this classification was in terms of the payment. However, these brief encounters never gave rise to sordid disputes between the woman and the man of the moment; everything was arranged with what might be called the hotel reception office, honestly on both sides. Improper exploitation of the prostitute is not recorded in any known description. The woman sold herself to the house accepting her for a sum of money, and there was a kind of contract which each side respected without trying to cheat. The official in charge of the district knew of these arrangements; he registered the prostitutes and prevented them from running away. If a rich client wished to take away a woman who pleased him or whom he had fallen in love with, to make her either his wife or his concubine, he had to reimburse the sums paid by the proprietor, and after negotiations and bargaining obtain what amounted to an exit permit freeing her for good. No exceptions whatsoever were allowed to these administrative rules, whatever the category of the house. Except in the case of violent disturbances or actual fighting, the police of the district did not intervene, and their supervision did not interfere with the freedom of the visitors. The latter were advised to leave their swords in the tea house at the entrance gate, but prints show that this advice was not always scrupulously heeded. From the same tea house some visitors hired a huge plaited rush hat to hide their faces, or concealed their features behind a thick scarf. These precautions were not occasioned by modesty, but were aimed solely at evading the vigilance of the family or of possible rivals. The prints are extremely discreet about these disguises.

Here is a man wandering idly in the streets; he stops at a tea house to hear the latest gossip, and in the evening watches the passing women, some on foot accompanied by their servants, others in palanquins. He approaches the brothels; through the light wooden grill can be seen more women chatting together, reading, writing, or playing music; incense burners emit a delicious scent. He engages in a discreet conversation, trying to show himself both witty and polite. He goes in, and on the stone steps of the antichamber sheds his shoes and with them the contamination of the outside world. This is a mark of cleanliness and a symbolic gesture; he is in fact entering another world. Perhaps he has already made a choice; if he does not yet know anyone, a girl employed by the house will introduce him. Perhaps he is already a regular customer, which makes everything much easier. Anyhow, he has been sized up: if he is allowed to go to the rooms above, it is because they are sure he will pay up without any fuss and be generous in the matter of the tip. The bill, elegantly done up in fine paper, is placed in a little box where sprigs of pine, bamboo, and, according to the season, prunus or cherry are planted. All he then has to do is to woo the lady and get his reward.

We have intentionally used the brutal word "prostitute" which, however refined their trade might be, underlines its mercenary nature. However, even if some idealization on the part of the painters and writers is taken into account, the word "courtesan" is really the least unsuitable. Jippensha Ikku wrote the text of Utamaro's Album of the Green Houses, often mentioned by Edmond de Goncourt. According to the latter: "The women of Yoshiwara (and of the reserved districts in other towns) were brought up like princesses. From childhood their education was as complete as possible: in reading, writing, art, music, the tea ceremony, the use of perfume." Great care was paid to their diction, a matter that had seemed very important to Kenko; they had completely lost their regional accent, and employed the



女のはるとどとは、一大のはるととととというはるととという。ことととは、一大のはるとという。





vocabulary of the great ladies of the Court; they were versed in calligraphy, which according to the novelists (see the *Tale of Genji*, for example) indicated a person's breeding; they had acquired a literary culture and could improvise a little poem in reply to one presented to them; they knew the art of using perfume as well as all the elegant and mannered movements of the tea ceremony, which no devotee could resist; they were skilled in playing the classical musical instruments, and it would be added to Jippensha Ikku's description that they knew how to choose the flowers suited to the day and season and arrange them in a vase according to the rules of *Ikebana*.

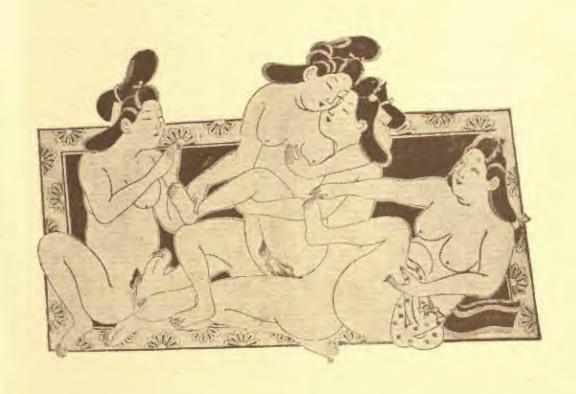
Here is some advice from the Album of the Green Houses: "She who immerses herself in a book without listening to the others chattering is the one who will entertain you most agreeably once you are on terms of intimacy. She who from time to time whispers with her neighbours, hides her face to smother a laugh, and looks you full in the face is capable of gulling you with surprising knavishness She who has her hands inside her dress at chest level and her head downcast, and gazes long at nothing has a heartache. She will amuse you much the first time or two, but the day when you have won her heart she will leave you no more She who gossips, cracks jokes, and laughs with the proprietor's assistant and suddenly turns to listen to a passer-by singing is an extremely capricious creature. If you have the same tastes, she will immediately cherish you She who busies herself writing letters is a woman who wants to build up a clientele. To become her special lover will be difficult, but if you are old, ugly, and incapable of rousing love in other women you will at least have her for the irresistible attraction of your gold She who while still quite young spends her time in playing has remained an innocent; you will be able to do what you like with her."

Jippensha Ikku was obviously discussing the courtesans of the first category, those who were lucky enough to have received the education of a princess. But if you glance over the most famous kabuki plays you find plenty of misery. O Sagi, for example, whose mother's illness has made her run up debts; O Kuma, who sold herself to save her husband from destitution and takes her revenge on her admirers so well that she is nicknamed the Snare; or the two sisters who go to Yoshiwara to pay off the debts of their father, a farmer, and when bought out, think of nothing but avenging his death. Finally, there is the special case of Katsuragi, which was perhaps not uncommon. She sells herself to save her husband's honour, and becomes one of the most famous and wealthy of courtesans. She repulses both her husband who has come to fetch her and her infatuated lover who wishes to buy her



out. Faithful to her new circumstances, she has decided to belong to nobody, or, which comes to the same thing, to everybody.

Katsuragi belongs to the category whose customs are described by Jippensha Ikku. She does not bestow her favours straight away. She makes a judicious choice among her suitors and requires a kind of ceremonial, and three visits are barely sufficient for her to agree to the real night of love and what was called "ripe acquaintance". This night is preceded by an intimate supper served with ivory chop sticks in a porcelain bowl bearing the arms of the lady. After a generous distribution of tips to the numerous employees of the house, the man is permitted to keep the lady for several days or even a whole week, and enjoys "a married life that is nothing but a succession of entertainments and pleasurable

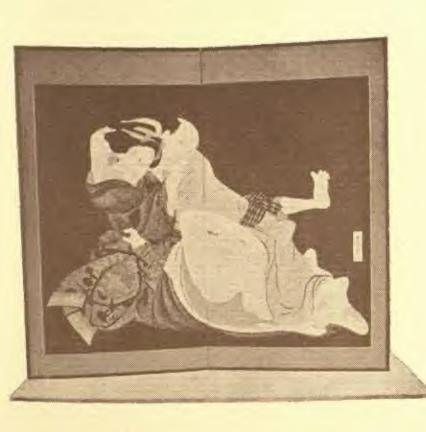


distractions." Jippensha Ikku adds: "In a society like this it is absolutely necessary to concern yourself with the splendid appearance of your paramour; be generous in expenditure and do not neglect the smallest attention. On important occasions outdo your rivals, and make yourself loved by the employees by offering them tips from time to time. As soon as you are favoured and well known in the house, you can do anything and all pleasures await you,"











By her beauty, wealth, and cleverness the courtesan Katsuragi attracts respect and fame. Lovers throng around her ardent coldness. Other courtesans are more susceptible, however, and they are the ones most often portrayed in the *kabuki* plays or in the puppet theatre. They too are beautiful and their caresses arouse desire, but they can love and if necessary sacrifice themselves for love.

Listen to the little speech of a courtesan to a friend who is lamenting the absence of her lover (The Courier to Hell, by Chikamatsu).

"Every one says that the courtesan is faithless, but those who say so do not speak the truth. This is just the opinion of the ignoramuses, of people who know nothing of life. Fundamentally, truth and untruth are one and the same thing. Take for example a girl who is loyally attached to her lover and would even risk her life for him. For a time her lover stops coming to see her and communicating with her; the girl cannot, in her state of bondage, herself go and see him, however ardently she may wish to do so. In such circumstances, she finally resigns herself to being bought out by another man and so she is found to have broken her vows. On the other hand, if a suitor for whom a courtesan has pretended affection pursues his suit assiduously until she agrees to marry him, all the untruths she has told him in the beginning become truths. Thus in the world of love there is neither truth nor untruth—only the existence of certain affinities that give rise to truthfulness. How often indeed it happens that a courtesan pines away with love for so long that in the end, having totally lost hope, she gives her lover up in discouragement! In such a case, the man cannot but be indignant at her alleged indifference and inconstancy. But to blame her would not be reasonable." This speech, full of practical philosophy, gives only paltry consolation to the ladies present, who exclaim: "There is nothing to do for such troubles; there is nothing we can ever do against love. To have sweethearts, we must admit, is a universal custom among the ladies of the district." And the author adds: "all these love-sick girls fall into a melancholy humour."

We shall limit ourselves to a few comments. With the exception of the ambitious, in whom selfish vanity takes the place of sex, courtesans are unsatisfied women. The courtesan needs a real lover; she dreams of being bought out, of becoming a faithful wife. For their part, men, even if seeking wild sensuality, always hope that real feeling will unite them to their mistress of the moment.

These great-hearted courtesans have drawn tears from many readers of novels and spectators at the theatre. Saikaku describes the love between the handsome Seijuro and the courtesan Minagawa,





that like treasures they kept under their clothes. A very popular kabuki play (The Lovers' Nightmare at Yoshiwa) extols the passion of Komurasaki, one of the most beautiful of the courtesans, for Gompachi, a brave and handsome brigand whom she follows to death. Another play, quite recent, since it dates only from 1881, depicts a famous courtesan, Michitose, "love-sick" for a bad character. She has guessed that this spurious samurai is a criminal. Her love for him nevertheless becomes so great that she swears to follow him to death if he is taken and condemned. She keeps her oath.

Mention might also be made of the play that ends in the cemetery at Toribeyama. O-Some, an adulated courtesan, loves a young samurai; but, defying the law, he kills an enemy in single combat in the precincts of Yoshiwara. To vindicate his honour, nothing remains for him then but seppuku (which we call harakiri). In the great necropolis by moonlight his mistress kills herself with him.

These sudden passions arriving like a bolt from the blue, and the overwhelming encounter of two looks, have often been put on the stage. "They gazed long into each other's eyes and fell in love for evermore". As well as the obsessiveness of love, this time-honoured expression shows the almost magic power of the act of looking and denotes a certain belief in fate, perhaps determined by *karma*. Lastly, it puts forward the idea that sexual union, though desirable, is not necessarily the governing factor in emotional feeling.

In most cases the courtesans fell in love with merchants, chonins, or the sons of chonins. At first with money to spend, the latter very quickly turned out to be poor, either because their families had disinherited them, or because they had squandered the capital of their business or embezzled funds without their mistresses knowing. This subject was an undoubted temptation to dramatists seeking success: was it not an affecting spectacle to see these high priestesses of love, spoiled by a luxurious life, prefer a poor wretch and devote themselves to him body and soul, even to death? Nevertheless, even if their feelings were completely sincere, it is quite clear too, judging from the confidences noted above, that the courtesans always thought a great deal about being bought out, and that it was probably easier for her to marry a commoner; he was certainly more understanding than a man of the warrior caste or the son of a noble family, whose caste prejudices remained strong—and this is to leave out of account the rigorous matrimonial laws of the aristocracy, which were nearly as restrictive as the reserved districts of the Green Houses. Thus A-Saga dearly loves a porcelain merchant and accompanies him to his death;

thus Yatsuhashi, the most beautiful girl in Yoshiwara, for love of a poor young man repulses a rich but coarse admirer and is stabbed to death by the latter in his jealousy. Poor Chubei steals from his own business to keep the wonderful Umegawa, who for her part refuses the wealth offered by uncouth and drunken louts. "Suicide Pact at Amajima", by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, had a triumphal success. Jihei, a small merchant, worships the beautiful Koharu, and they exchange with one another the most lasting of vows. But he is often held up to ridicule by his rivals. His wife, sorry for him and understanding





his love, writes to Koharu that she will sacrifice herself; the lovers, however, victims of their hopeless infatuation, kill themselves after a beautiful prayer to Amida for their two souls to be reunited in "The Paradise of the Pure Land". We could continue indefinitely the examination of these extremely realistic plays, whose plots are borrowed from everyday life and even from items of news. In fact, numerous double suicides had really taken place and were sometimes made into plays only a few weeks after the event.

We have said enough to give some idea of the extraordinary prestige of the courtesan. Subject to the law like any other Japanese woman, practising a profession that was not recognized but tolerated, she was not only a sex symbol; she was also the symbol of free love and of an advanced and refined civilization.

On a less lofty level (even though Japanese decorative art has produced some of its greatest creations in this field), the courtesan was also the setter of fashion. Outside the reserved districts her influence extended even to fashionable circles, and connoisseurs described her dresses in minute detail.

Nudity on the other hand was little esteemed. Certainly there are nudes in the prints, but infinitely fewer than might be imagined, and we are a long way from the marked taste for the human body we have inherited from the Greeks. Baths in Japan, as is known, brought men and women together naked without any sexual implications. Nakedness was seen but not observed; apart from the need for cleanliness, it was considered a little shameful. We should remember that the punishment for a geisha who had prostituted herself was, as the ultimate disgrace, to be exposed naked in the street. So, when Seijuro, the hero of

the story by Saikaku, wishes to imitate the habits described in the Chinese legend *The Islands of Nakedness* and compels the courtesans to undress, he comes up against reserves and almost refusal. He even realizes that naked girls are definitely less beautiful and less attractive.

It is curious in the light of that tale to reread the story of the same Saikaku entitled: The Publisher of Almanachs. Some young men, friends, are watching women passing in a street in Kyoto and, filled with the joy of spring, they attempt to define beauty. About thirty, they feel, is the ideal age; the complexion should conjure up "the blossoms of the early cherry"; the mouth should have "the colour of the red maple". The neck should be long and supple, the gaze frank and steady, the nose small, and the hair line on the forehead well defined. The marvellous abundance of the hair when loosened must at least be imaginable; the ear must be gracefully attached to the head, the face be rounded without heaviness. The fingers and toes must be small but well covered. Not the slightest reference, you will observe, to the figure; the expression so common in Europe, "a pretty girl with a nice figure", has no meaning for these young connoisseurs. On the other hand they notice the gait; the light and noiseless gliding step, the slight swing of the hips that unobtrusively suggests a theatrical pose.

What is described at length are the clothes worn, which reveal the taste and personality of the wearer. Dresses are worn on top of each other, generally to the number of three. Such and such a woman has an innermost dress of glazed white satin; her middle dress is of blue satin; her topmost dress is of orange-coloured satin, and on her left sleeve is embroidered a phrase from Kenko. Another is dressed very carelessly; she is a salesgirl in a tobacco shop, but, say our young men, her face is so perfect that if she was well dressed she would set hearts on fire. Yet another is a little eccentric, which is not unbecoming. Her three dresses are of black silk, but the lowest part is lined with red satin and her topmost dress is embroidered with escutcheons in gold thread; are they coats of arms of her favourite actors or of her cherished lovers? She wears a broad sash (obi) of Chinese brocade and a hat similar to those worn by actors taking female parts. The most beautiful of these passers-by has an ambiguous charm, her hair being parted in the manner of young men. She is very young. Her innermost dress is of white satin patterned in the "Indian Ink" style. On top of this she wears a bronze satin dress worked with a peacock. Her coat is a sort of close network of Bengal thread and reveals the dress below through it; her sash is decorated with the "Twelve Colours".

Utamaro, in his series Twelve Hours in the Green Houses mentioned by Edmond de Goncourt, and













Suzuki Haronubu, in his album *The Pretty Woman of Yoshiwara*, make us appreciative of the decorative refinement of the costumes. Nearly always the dresses have a long train and, in the middle of love-making, billow around the lovers in the graceful curves that Japanese artists delighted in.

Hyashi, the great merchant connoisseur who so ably advised Edmond de Goncourt in his studies of the prints, could in his description have made more of the harmonies and contrasts obtained by wearing kimonos. Thus sea-green blends with brick-red below or with gold damask; and how well white goes with black, matt with glossy, forming a harmony of subtle variations. Edmond de Goncourt noted with discernment the shading off of the mauves, violets, and blues; and the variety of reds and greens, sometimes heightened by silver.

The woven, embroidered, or painted background is derived from Japanese asymmetry and clever stylization akin to abstract art. In it will be found all the variations possible on the classical themes and symbols, renewed each time by the creative talent of the artist: flights of cranes, sparrows, and swallows; interlacing branches and leaves; Chinese calligraphy; plants and flowers according to the season—weeping willows, pines, plum and cherry blossom, peonies, irises, wistaria, wild grasses, lotuses, and water lentisks.

How far removed we are as we view these scenes from the hasty ill-considered ideas about the reserved districts and the prostitutes we may form in Europe! The pleasures of the flesh in Japan are never divorced from the pleasures of sound, perfume, and colour. It should be no surprise to anyone that the great Japanese artists from the 17th century to the beginning of the 19th should have been interested in the special world of the reserved districts and have all painted or engraved *shunga*, the *Pictures of Spring*.

It should also be remembered that the writers were nearly always much more realistic and more erotic than the painters.

The tourist in a hurry or the foreigner without eyes or ears, even if captivated by the outward appearance of the country, has difficulty in realizing the gaiety of the Japanese, or understanding the Japanese taste for laughter, humour, and vulgar, indeed, one is tempted to say, bawdy, jokes.

The tradition goes back to the Homeric laughter of the gods at the comic and lascivious impromptu dance of the goddess Usume, and is still to be found in the *cha-ya*, the tea houses where sake has loosened the tongue and broken down reserve.



This is true not only for the working classes, the craftsmen, and the peasants, but also for the priests or the sen-sei, the grave professors with the stiff bearing.

People laugh a lot in Japan, but especially the Japanese among themselves. They laugh at plays on words and at scandal, which is not the exclusive prerogative of women; at a good story that is slightly spicy or even openly smutty; at blunders and awkwardness; at surnames and nicknames, of which people are fond; at anything that looks in the least pretentious or pompous; at the sudden shock of the unexpected, the witty sally or remark. The affable humour of Kenko is fundamentally Japanese; but long before him artists delighted in depicting burlesque scenes where they could give free rein to their taste for realism and even caricature. One example is to be found in the scroll Shigisan Enjin, The Story of the Flying Granary, which according to the recent studies of T. Kobayashi goes back, not to the 12th century as had been thought, but to the 11th century, and was probably the work of a humanist and anti-conformist monk of the Tendai sect on Mount Hiei, above Kyoto. It tells the story of a rich and miserly farmer of Yamasaki, who showed no pity to the peasants who worked for him. One day he refused to give alms to a begging hermit. This hermit, as it happened, was a magician, as all hermits are, and was protected by the gods. All he needed to do was to place his begging bowl under the farmer's great rice granary and the granary rose into the air and flew to the top of the mountain. The wicked miser was filled in turn with astonishment, rage, and despair and rushed wildly after his granary, to the smiles and then open hilarity of the villagers, who found the joke harsh but justified. One never wearies of looking at this scroll, following the shifting emotions on the faces of the spectators of the miracle through a succession of scenes that are all treated with a very precise feeling for the drawing of crowds, and yet with everyone remaining individual.

What is there to be said about what is called the *Toba-e*, a group of scrolls attributed, a little generously perhaps, to the bishop Kakuyu Toba, who died in September 1140 at an advanced age? Does laughter not keep one young? The drawings are of monkeys, rabbits, frogs, and foxes to whom the artist has given human features, especially those of people in authority, priests, judges, and officials, not to mention thieves big and small. Drawn with a brush, in firm decisive strokes, with incisive accuracy and an unequalled power of anatomical observation, these human animals, in the expressions on their faces and in their gestures, have a comic force that has rarely been achieved, penetrated through and through with criticism of contemporary manners and morals.

Many other examples could be cited. But there is certainly one that rates special mention because of its difficulty of access. The temple of Emman-In near the Miidera temple on Lake Biwa possesses a scroll that would have enraptured Rabelais. On it are depicted two enemy villages that decide to settle their disputes by war in due form: the gas war. The two armies stuff themselves as a preliminary with beans and other fermentable food. Then the soldiers, either in close columns or in skirmishing order, confront each other, if that is the proper expression, and let fly with their gas guns. We need not describe in detail this heroic combat, the ups and downs of which are uproariously funny; but note the beauty of the drawing and the skill with which the painter has captured movement and given each attitude, each face—both in front and behind— a characteristic and lively individuality. The tradition is a great one and was destined not to be forgotten by the painters in their prints.

This realism is not at all alien to us. Rabelais did not think of the gas war, but before him a sculptor of Berry, in the staircase leading down to the crypt of Bourges Cathedral, both expressed his feelings about the devil and showed that the enemy of the human race can be repulsed by a well directed stink. As you go down, you see on the right wall a pair of tightened buttocks aiming at the opposite wall, on which the devil's head is shown, grimacing with horror before this improper, contemptuous, but effective attack.

Mention has already been made of the kyogen, the comic interludes between the Noh dramas. They go back very far, even though their form was scarcely established before the 14th and 15th centuries. The make fun of the established powers, as we have already said, and their mockery, tempered with laughter, is often biting and salacious. The kyogen link up with ancient and contemporary tales about the tengu, the long-nosed devils of Mount Kurama, to the north of Kyoto, and about the kappa, slimy disturbing creatures that haunt rivers and ponds.

The kabuki, whose original function was to divert and amuse, contains in its repertory comedies such as Migawari Zazen, which was inspired by a kyogen. A young daimyo married to a jealous shrew escapes the surveillance of his wife to rejoin his mistress Hanako. He disguises himself as a pilgrim, then as a woman, and is finally caught and made to look ridiculous.

We have already mentioned the scroll painting of Daigo-ji, which describes in much detail habits of the priests more or less acknowledged and permitted among themselves. Is this a purely erotic or a humorous subject? Certainly it could not fail to make people laugh.

























In the work we present, humour is not missing. A man in a hurry getting out of a bath knocks a washerwoman over, nearly sending her head first into her wash-tub (p. 57); a meddling intruder at an awkward moment approaches a couple who are still only getting ready (p. 137); another with a decided step, a lantern in her hand, catches hold of a man's scanty loin-cloth and tries to drag him forcibly away from his love-making (p. 138); inquisitive or jealous servants spy on a couple through a door (p. 97), hypoctitically covering their faces. Elsewhere, a lover, although a lusty fellow, is worsted by a jealous wife armed with two long pipes, while the presumed partner in his guilt calmly repairs her make-up (p. 132). Another jealous woman brandishes under the nose of her lover a sheaf of letters she has found in his sash; she is holding him by the scruff of the neck, while he raises his hands to ward off her blows (p. 154). Harunobu has drawn two cats following the example of their masters on the veranda (p. 134).

It is important to emphasize this Rabelaisian irony, so characteristic of these erotic prints.

All the paintings and prints of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries are grouped together under the general name of *Ukiyo-e*. They mostly show scenes of the world of pleasure, courtesans and actors. Perhaps we should generalize a little more and say that the *Ukiyo-e* deal with contemporary life and especially the life of the people. This is what R. Lane, of Columbia University, has done in his extremely intelligent and comprehensive book on the Japanese print. He shows that genre painting had already been much extended by the traditional schools of Tosa and Kano, which depicted journeys to famous sites, popular festivals, street scenes, and little events in the daily lives of the citizens. He mentions as examples the scroll of the *Story of the Cavern*, of the end of the 16th century, the scroll from the Tenjin shrine, of the beginning of the 17th century, and a painting dating from the end of the 16th century representing the flight of Narihira into the wilds. Towards 1640 the first paintings of celebrated courtesans appeared, and this marks the beginning of the *Ukiyo-e* school properly so-called, which reflected a shifting and ephemeral world. Lane quotes a passage from *Asai Ryoi (Stories of the Shifting World*, Kyoto, about 1661), which explains the title clearly. According to this passage, to live uniquely in the

















present moment, to be absorbed only in the beauty of the moon or the snow, the cherry trees in flower or the leaves of the maple, to sing, drink, and be happy, letting oneself simply float along without effort, to meet the baleful stare of adversity with supreme indifference, to refuse to be discouraged, and, like a straw, to surrender to the river current—this is what is called the ephemeral and shifting world.

This definition is interesting, for it applies not only to the reserved districts but to all Japanese society of the time and is extremely accurate. There was a sort of instinctive reaction against the ruthless dictatorship of the Tokugawas. The painters were not content with taking their models from the court-esans; they widened their field of vision. We have proof of this in this book. In it there are a dozen or so erotic scenes that certainly do not take place in a brothel. Some show us life on the pleasure craft called "Treasure Boats"; there may be courtesans there, but the boats are primarily meeting-places for secret assignations. Others take place in private gardens like that on page 92, which is a large garden near a river blooming with irises; or, like that on page 38, behind a rock against which the samurai has leaned his sword; or, like that on page 107, in the country, with the man ardent and eager but the woman looking uneasily around; or on a boat, like that on page 102, where the meeting is obviously secret.

The naturalism of the artists is manifested in a thousand ways. Sometimes there are the stories of ghosts (pp. 123, 129, and 130); sometimes a sort of surrealism of the sexual imagination (p. 129). The painting of the Kobuka school (p. 126) showing a servant slipping a little album of *shunga* into the long sleeve of her mistress suggests the erotic reveries of the courtesan. A series of prints and of paintings illustrates the Chinese tales of *The Islands of Nakedness*, which the hero of Saikuku wished to enact in reality (pp. 142–147).

Nevertheless, the life of the courtesans remains the subject of choice in the prints.

These are always beautiful works of art, as the reader will be easily persuaded, even when they are specially ordered from the publishers by the keepers of the brothels. Some albums depicting the beauty of the courtesans also give their names and addresses. The Yoshiwara Pillow, published about 1660, is a sort of sexual guide to the 48 positions, and it is not surprising to learn that some of the courtesans slipped this little book under their pillow expressly for their client.

The tradition of drawing goes back a long way; line drawing is essentially Chinese or Japanese, as we know. With the print, rigorous purity of line becomes a necessity. The artist has to think of the engraver, who makes a transfer on to the block and then cuts out the wood. To begin with, there was only one

block, and many prints were coloured by hand, which restricted their circulation. In the 18th century colours were put on with the block itself, or rather with a series of carefully registered blocks.

Space is never three-dimensional, but a succession of parallel planes superimposed on each other without overlapping. It was only in the 19th century that the Japanese had any idea of our perspective; we find a few experiments in it in landscapes by Hiroshige or Kuniyoshi, but atmospheric perspective remains the one of choice. The light is even and absolute without any counterbalancing shadow, and purely tonal black does not enter into the pattern. Thus the universe is suggested rather than drawn, with bold and expressive conciseness. It is easy to understand why the Japanese print has had such a decisive influence on European painters of the 19th century. Obvious traces of it are found in Toulouse-Lautrec and Gauguin, to mention only two of them.

We shall rapidly introduce the artists whose works are reproduced in this book.

First Hishikawa Moronobu, who died in 1694, and who dominates the 17th century. Son of an embroiderer, he was at the beginning of his career a pupil of the traditionalist school of Tosa. Established



at Edo (Tokyo) towards 1660, he devoted himself to genre painting and book illustration. At this period he developed his own personal style. He engraved samurai of brutal appearance who, one feels, were susceptible to the charms of poetry and sentimental courtesans. Nevertheless he did not give up painting, where he could give free rain to his taste for colour. There are at least 150 book illustrations by him, but out of this total we are sure of only twenty-four erotic works; we also know that, far from being destined for the general public, this work, which sold for very high prices, only reached a select group of refined readers. In these engravings there is a strange and dramitic intensity, almost magnetic in quality.

Sometimes Moronobu and Sugimaru Jihei are mistaken for each other, even though the former is distinguished more by his masterly vigour and the latter by a more captivating grace. Sugimura was Moronobu's disciple and towards 1680 became his rival. Two thirds of his work is of erotic inspiration, but the painter seeks to portray in it charm rather than power, sensuality rather than pure sexuality.

Torii Kiyonobu, born about 1664 at Osaka, the son of a *kabuki* actor who was a painter himself, also came under the influence of Moronobu. It is nevertheless clear that the dynamic and ostentatious conceptions of the theatre modified his style. About 1700 he brought out the *Book of Actors*, and almost at the same time the *Book of Courtesans*. It is hardly surprising that, living close to the stage as he did, he should have devoted some erotic albums to pederasty.

Among his descendants we find Kiyonaga Torii, in whose works more nudes are to be found. This unusual form of *Ukiyo-e* does not seem to have been generally appreciated by art lovers.

With Okumura Masanobu (1686-1764) the coloured print appears. The vigour and vivacity of his style asserted themselves as early as 1701 with the appearance of the *Album of the Courtesan*. In 1720 he founded his own publishing house and, by choosing his own engravers, could indulge his love of colour.

It was he who set the ball rolling. Another painter borrowed his name as a pseudonym: Masanobu Kitao (1761–1816), better known under the name of Kyoden. The latter became famous through his Album of Courtesans, published between 1782 and 1784, a collection of large prints devoted especially to the amusements of the ladies of Yoshiwara.

Harunobi Suzuki, younger than Masanobu (1725-1770), is a painter of fragile femininity, of Chinese inspiration. The papers he used, his colours, and his techniques bear witness to great elegance and refinement, but they in no way interfere with his erotic realism. He painted the portraits of celebrated courtesans such as Onsen or Ofuji.

In Toyonobu Ishikawa (1711-1785) we again find the influence of Masanobu. His prints, nearly all lacquered, mixed realism with a touching feeling for humanity. He readily painted nudes.

Shonsho Katsukawa (1726-1793), like Sharaku, was one of the painters of the *kabuki*. His originality lay in his opposition to the conventionalism of the Torii school (Kiyonobu and, at the beginning, Kiyonaga). Rather than seek idealized types, he concentrated on the psychology of his models. He was a subtle colourist, and illustrated the *Tales of Ise*, which describe the amorous adventures of the hero Narihira. His paintings also reveal varied and vigorous talent.



His pupil, Shuncho Katsugawa, who was active between 1770 and the end of the century, returned to the tradition of idealized women, long and slim, like those painted by Utamaro. This master was already on the brink of preciosity.

The Utagawa school, of which we give a few reproductions, was founded by Toyohara Utagawa (1735–1814). He endeavoured to combine western perspective with the traditional Japanese atmospheric perspective. His work may be regarded as linking East and West.

But the fame of the school at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century is due to the two Toyokuni. This eclectic school, like the others, portrays the grace of the kabuki actors. Women



are often shown in weary detached poses that might be characterized as romantic. From this time on prints proliferated; publishers no longer chose artists with the same exacting care, but sought to obtain the maximum circulation for their publications, following the taste of the man in the street rather than the aristocratic tendencies of the past. From the second quarter of the 19th century, but not before, the print became a popular art and linked up with folklore. There are, however, exceptions.

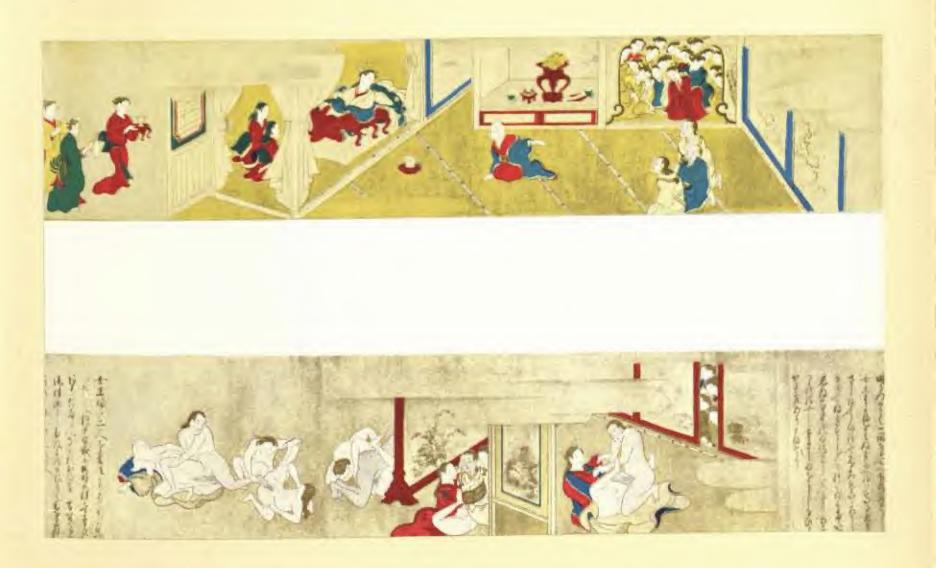
Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1848) is known as the last great figure of the *Ukiyo-e*. As well as being a great innovator, he represents the apogee of the Japanese art of drawing. There is no subject, including the erotic, that he did not touch on under one or other of his various pseudonyms. It was he who inspired



Shinsai, Hokkei, Gakutei, Shigenobu, his two daughters Oei and Tatsu, and finally, Hokuba and his school, a fine painting of which we reproduce.

At this period, the beginning of the 19th century, the Eizen school holds an important place. Not only was its output extremely abundant, but it represented the turning point between the past and future. Figure painting and the illustration of erotic books continued, but at the same time landscapes and everything in nature began to be painted.

We have kept to the end of this rapid survey the great Utamaro Kitagawa (1753-1806). He is certainly the one among them all who best understood the psychology of the courtesan and her sexual



attractiveness. His aristocratic work is imbued with a voluptuous sensuality that makes it unique. Edmond de Goncourt has written at length on his life and justifiably called him the Painter of the Green Houses.

Edmond de Goncourt's analysis has the merit of bearing not only on Utamaro but on the entire range of erotic prints. We quote him at length, for what he says could not be better said:

"The erotic paintings of this people should be studied by connoisseurs of drawing for the fiery passion of the copulations depicted, as though they were inspired by rage; for the confusion created, the jumbled heaps of lovers, the upset screens of the rooms; for the intertwined bodies fused together



in passion; for the nervous, eager movements of arms both welcoming and repulsing sexual passion; for the contortions of those feet in the air, those writhing toes; for those devouring kisses mouth to mouth; for those swooning women, their heads uptilted on the ground, their faces deathlike, their eyes closed beneath painted eyelids; and finally, for that strength and power of delineation that make the drawing of a penis equal to that of a hand in the Louvre Museum attributed to Michelangelo.

Then, in the middle of these animal frenzies of the flesh, there are delectable meditations of the whole being, blissful prostrations, preoccupations like those of our primitive painters, mystic attitudes, loving impulses of almost religious intensity.



Sometimes in these erotic compositions a hilariously eccentric imagination is at work, as in the sketch showing the lascivious dream of a woman who having thrown the bedcovers off because of of the heat, sees, while fanning herself with immense fans, a phallus swinging and dancing a farandole under Japanese robes. This is a completely original composition, the offspring of the brain and brush of an artist in an hour of libertine fancy.

Sometimes there are terrible and somewhat frightening prints. One for example, of rocks green with seaweed on which lies the naked body of a woman swooning with pleasure, so like a corpse that you do not know if she is alive or drowned and dead. The lower part of her body is being sucked at by an octopus with terrifying pupils in the shape of black quarter moons, while a small octopus eats greedily at her mouth.

There are others in the strange book entitled Yehon-Kimmo-Zuye, Illustrated Encyclopaedia for the Young, whose drawings have some affinity with the books of writers of unbridled imagination and extravagant conceits, with those rather mad books in which, according to Montaigne; "the mind like a runaway horse gives birth to chimeras." In this queer compendium of astronomy, astrology, and physiology there are kinds of puzzles combining philosophy and pornography, where the sexuality of human beings is changed into maps of the sky and the earth, where the male organ is transformed into fantastic little men from unknown planets, where the genitals of woman sometimes become an apocalyptic bird of prey, sometimes a landscape in which Fuji-Yama recognizably appears.

There are always some compositions worthy of the master Utamaro. In the book entitled *The First Essay on Women* there is a charming drawing of a woman, her arms entwined around her lover and her head bent in the attitude of a courting dove, held close against the breast of the man and caressing the back of his head, while the lower parts of their two bodies are joined in sexual union.

In A Thousand Kinds of Colours there is an amusing picture of a woman dropping her lantern at the sight of four feet sticking out from under a blanket—four feet, two of which are very hairy. The woman is recorded as asking, more or less: "How can there be four feet in one person's bed?"

A horrifying canvas by Utamaro representing lechery shows us a monster, an enormous palecomplexioned and cadaverous man, covered with wiry hairs, his mouth hideously deformed by a rictus of pleasure, sprawled wallowing on the body of a slim and graceful young woman. These are pictures in which, in the physical ecstasy of a human being, the artist has assuredly tried to render the enjoyment of the toad, by a succession of reminders, in which the little fan at the top of each picture shows the imitation of an animal by a man, and either by attitude or by gesture man is almost transformed in one canvas into a crab, in another into a toad.

This picture is part of an album in colours entitled *The Poem of the Pillow*, a miracle of printing, of a softness and harmony approached, I must repeat, by no European printing. In it the clarity of the



nude bodies stands out brilliantly from the colours of the silk clothes scattered in these amorous revels, and the tawny patch of the mons Veneris contrasts voluptuously with the whiteness, barely tinged with pink, of the feminine skin.

If Edmond de Goncourt had known the collection of prints possessed by Toulouse-Lautrec—which is now scattered but of which photographs still exist— he would have been able to enrich his gallery of imaginative deformations and magic embraces. Toulouse-Lautrec appears to have been interested in terrifying pictures: ghosts violating women, animals embracing human beings, monsters, monkeys, vampires, foxes, or tanuki (polecats).

The last reproduction in this book is a print of Utamaro's. Here is what Edmond de Goncourt says about it:

"Utamaro, who is inferior to Hokusai in his works of fantasy and has never done anything to equal the five terrifying heads of that master, has the gift of fantasy in the erotic. This canvas depicts a water goddess raped under water by amphibious monsters, with all around curious little fish trying to slip in with the monsters. Meanwhile, crouched on the bank of a little island, a young and half-naked fishergirl watches the strange and disturbing spectacle in the abyss, languidly ready to yield to temptation."

All the deviations and all the nightmares of the sexually disordered imagination are thus to be found in Japanese erotic art. At the end of the 19th century, Europe was captivated by the fantastic element in this art. Its captivation was probably excessive, for these pictures form only a small part—and that the least normal—of a sexuality that is openly and frankly acknowledged, with no tincture of cynicism, and throughout all its manifestations remains natural.

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